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DUNGEON

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DUNGEON®

DUNGEON

183

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Adventures Wanted

The very best part of my job is selecting adventures for publication in *Dungeon* and working with authors to develop them into the best excursions they can be. In the final analysis, the entire point of a Dungeons & Dragons session is adventure. Players don't gather around the table to ooh and ahh over one another's characters. They assemble to stomp monsters, explore dark places, gather loot, and protect the world against evil.

If you'd like to write adventures for *Dungeon* Magazine, here are some tips to get you started and to maximize your odds for landing a contract.

First, know the market. Currently, we deal in four types of adventures:

- Features run 6-12,000 words and can be on just about any topic or theme;
- Chaos Scar adventures follow the dungeon delve model (mostly), run 4-6,000 words, and need to have some association with the Chaos Scar and its story;
- Side treks run 3-5,000 words and should either be associated with a print adventure or suitable for insertion into a longer adventure;
- Encounter sites run 2-4,000 words and detail a single encounter in an unusual or especially challenging locale.

Those aren't set in stone; we've broken the frames before and will again in the future (in December, for example, we've scheduled a Rob Schwalb extravaganza that's nearly the size of a printed, 32-page adventure). A proposal needs to be compelling to step outside the format. Suggesting a 10,000 word Chaos Scar adventure does not by itself qualify that proposal as something new and different.

Second, provide enough information in your proposal to get the idea across without going into too much detail. We like to see

- A statement of the adventure's theme in a sentence or two;
- A synopsis of events in however many paragraphs are needed;
- An estimate of new material (monsters, magic items) that you'd like to include.

Aim for a proposal that's no more than a few hundred words long. Keeping it short saves you work if the idea you're proposing is something we're not interested in or if we already have someone else writing a similar adventure. It also shows us that you can write effectively.

Put the proposal in the body of the email, not attached as a separate document.

Provide your name; I prefer beginning a letter of response with someone's name rather than their email address.

If you have prior publishing credits, especially with Wizards of the Coast, mention that.

Finally, be creative. We like to work within established formats but not within thematic constraints. "Rescue the kidnapped farmer from the goblins" has been done. And it's mundane. We're actively looking for ideas that carry players into fantastical realms. That doesn't need to be the Feywild or the Elemental Chaos, although it can be. Some of the best proposals we've seen lately (and which we hope to publish in 2011) involve Feywild crossovers run amok, devices that disrupt time, astronomers who puncture the Far Realm, and a tower half-submerged in a bog.

That's everything you need to know to get started, except where to send your ideas, which is submissions@wizards.com. Begin your subject line with "Dungeon" so we know which magazine the proposal is for and give it a short, descriptive subject.

We hope to hear from you soon..

Revenge of the Marauders

by Bruce R. Cordell

illustration by Wayne Reynolds

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The raider lord Yarnath prowls the wastelands in his crawling citadel called Slither. Not long ago, Yarnath bent all his effort toward recovering an artifact fragment known as the Crown of Dust. But someone beat him to it.

Yarnath did not come away empty-handed. Though he did not find the fragment he sought, his raiders located the crown jewel of the ancient artifact. This red stone, called the Blood Jewel, is the crystallized blood of an ancient primordial. With it, Yarnath might unlock the power of a being mighty enough to slay the ancient gods. Does anyone dare to oppose him?

"Revenge of the Marauders" is a Dungeons & Dragons® adventure for five characters of levels 5-7 set in the *Dark Sun* world of Athas (5th-level characters may have a harder time completing the adventure, but they should be able to accomplish their objective if they make few mistakes).

Background

If characters become entangled in this adventure, they can learn the following information. The time involved in gathering this information can vary from a few hours to several days, depending on the source. Be sure that players explain where they're getting their information, and feel free to adjust the DCs upward or downward to reward clever plans or reflect the lowered potential of a poor approach to the problem.

DC 11 History or Streetwise: Not long ago, a raider lord called Yarnath the Skull unleashed his forces to harass and disrupt merchant caravans operating near Tyr. The Revolutionary Council was stretched too thin to offer aid, and merchant lords were forced to hire mercenaries to deal with Yarnath. Apparently those mercenaries were successful, because Yarnath's harassment finally ceased.

DC 15 History or Streetwise: Yarnath sought a shrine dedicated to an entity called the Dust Kraken, a kind of sand monster.

DC 15 Streetwise: Rumor has it that Yarnath has unearthed a powerful relic in the desert, called the *Blood Jewel*. The raider lord believes the relic will unlock incredible power—power he could use to one day to raise his status from a mere desert raider to perhaps one day topple a city-state of Athas.

DC 15 Arcana or Religion: The Sea of Silt is home to a dormant beast of great elemental power known as the Dust Kraken, Ul-Athra, or the Mouths of Thirst. It is likely the silt horrors that hunt in the sea are the spawn of Ul-Athra. Over the centuries, a number of elemental cults have risen to worship the Dust Kraken, seeking to rouse the beast from its slumber and use its power against their enemies. These cults perform strange and unnatural rites in the name of their god.

DC 23 Arcana or Religion: Sometimes, those especially favored by Ul-Athra's dreaming awareness are rewarded with secrets of powerful elemental magic or vile rituals that summon and bind lesser avatars of the Dust Kraken.

The Real Story

Though Yarnath was foiled in recovering an artifact called the *Crown of Dust*, he was mollified by discovering a storied item once set in that crown called the *Blood Jewel*.

Knowing that the red crystal could be the key he required for ungodly power, Yarnath retreated with his crawling citadel into the deep desert with only a skeleton crew of raiders. Yarnath decided he would spend a season studying the jewel and unlocking its secrets without the interruptions that running daily raids would bring.

Little did Yarnath know that one of his mercenary raiders was a spy for the Veiled Alliance. When Yarnath dismissed the bulk of his forces to continue their raids far from his crawling citadel, the spy slipped away with news of the information. Kivrin, the spy, knew that such a large disruption in the raider lord's normal activities was exactly the sort of warning flag he needed to bring to the attention of others.

Adventure Synopsis

Kivrin, a Veiled Alliance agent looking for a group of adventurers, finds the player characters. Assuming terms are reached, Kivrin guides the characters across the desert to where Slither rests. One desert encounter later (Encounter S1), the heroes must undertake the delicate challenge (S2) of slipping inside the animate but undermanned fortress, overcome various challenges inside, and finally snatch the *Blood Jewel* before the raider lord realizes that thieves are in his stronghold (S3–S6).

NOTE: Characters visit only one of Slither's towers before they find what they came for and sneak out. Thus Slither remains a potential threat for later adventures.

MARAUDERS OF THE DUNE SEA

If your players had fun with *Marauders of the Dune Sea*, this adventure is related to those events. It's not necessary to have played *Marauders of the Dune Sea* to enjoy this adventure.

Adventure Hook

The heroes are approached by an elf named Kivrin; if one or more heroes has contacts in the Veiled Alliance, the introduction comes through them. He knows of the heroes if they evaded Slither in *Marauders*.

Kivrin could simply approach the characters and ask for their help. This is appropriate if the characters have had earlier dealings with the Veiled Alliance or if they played a role in the earlier fight against Yarnath.

Kivrin presents the information described under "The Real Story." He or she asks for the character's help and indicates that their aid could prevent the rise of a great evil. Kivrin accompanies the characters unless he's badly injured or dead. If the characters are 5th level, Kivrin could be a big help to them. If they're level 6 or 7, consider arranging for Kivrin to meet with a serious 'accident' early in the adventure to prevent characters from relying on him too much.

Alternative Hooks: Kivrin could blunder into the characters while racing to evade Templars. Another option would be to send the characters on an unrelated trek across the desert, where they find Kivrin dying—or already dead—but bearing a message which must reach the Veiled Alliance in a nearby city. You can then use the "Find the Veiled Alliance" skill challenge (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting* page 204) to pull the characters into events and set them on Yarnath's trail.

Major Quest: If the characters find and snatch the *Blood Jewel*, the group gains 150 XP.

Starting the Adventure

When the characters strike off into the roadless waste, they should know where they are going thanks to Kivrin acting as their guide. If Kivrin is not accompanying them for some reason, then they may have a harder time reaching Slither's resting site; it's up to you to decide how best to handle that situation.

Encounter S1: Crossing the Desert is included to spice up this desert crossing. It can be omitted if desired, but it emphasizes the inherent danger of a wilderness trek on Athas.

With Kivrin's guidance or reliable directions, the characters find Slither's resting spot in the lee of a massive sand dune in three days.

Gaining entry into the crawling citadel is where things become difficult. At that point, see **Encounter S2: Entering Slither**.

Elf Raid Leader (Kivrin)	Level 6 Artillery (Leader)
Medium fey humanoid	XP 250
HP 55; **Bloodied** 77	**Initiative** +9
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** +11
Speed 7	
Traits	
Wild Step	
The raid leader ignores difficult terrain whenever It shifts.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Obsidian Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 +5 damage, and the raid leader shifts 1 square.	
➶ **Bone Bow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 +5 damage.	
➶ **Harrying Shot** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 +5 damage, and until the end of the raid leader's next turn, its allies gain combat advantage against the target while adjacent to the target.	
Minor Actions	
Focus on the Pain ✦ **Encounter**	
Hit: One ally within 20 squares of the raid leader takes 5 damage and makes a saving throw with a +2 bonus.	
Triggered Actions	
Elven Accuracy ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The raid leader rerolls one of its attack rolls and uses the second result.	
Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +14	
Str 14 (+5) **Dex** 23 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+6)	
Con 13 (+4) **Int** 13 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment obsidian short sword, bone bow, 20 bone arrows	

Concluding the Adventure

Once the characters have the *Blood Jewel*, they can attempt to leave Slither the way they came into it. If Kivrin survives, he stresses that the only reason the characters are still alive is that the ritual tower is separated from the other towers, and the forces in the citadel are probably only now realizing that invaders are aboard Slither, as evidenced by the thri-kreen bounders that were summoned from somewhere through the magic circle.

It's likely that the players won't want their characters to suddenly be faced with paragon-level foes, hordes of other raiders, and perhaps the lich Yarnath. If they're smart, they'll heed Kivrin's advice and flee.

You can allow the characters to sneak or run away. If you feel like striking fear into them, modify the original Sneaking into Slither skill challenge; this time, it allows characters to escape. Add these additional modifications to the skill challenge: Each failure in the Sneaking In (Sneaking Out in this case) portion of the challenge costs the character a healing surge. If a character fails the challenge overall, he or she loses two additional healing surges. That character still makes it out of Slither, but Yarnath's forces can pursue or launch a few arrows at the fleeing figure.

With *Blood Jewel* in hand, the characters have further delayed Yarnath from discovering the power of the ancient sand kraken. If the characters are the same ones who prevented Yarnath from finding the *Crown of Dust* (from *Marauders of the Dune Sea*), they've also further cemented Yarnath's enmity for them. One day, there will be an accounting.

Blood Jewel **Level 8 Rare**

This blood red glowing crystal hovers about your head, bathing you in candle-bright red light.

Item Slot: Head 3,400 gp
Property: The item sheds bright, blood-red light.
Property: You make saving throws against ongoing untyped damage at the start of your turn instead of at the end of your turn.
Property: You gain a +2 bonus to all Charisma-based skill checks when dealing with servants and cultists of Ul-Athra.

Lore: If the *Blood Jewel* is ever set in the reconstructed *Crown of Dust* (an artifact composed of three lesser artifact fragments), additional, undreamed of powers could be unlocked. Yarnath believes that the *Blood Jewel* is the key to raising Ul-Athra.

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the new *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*™ ,*Keep on the Shadowfell*™, *Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons*™, and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including *Plague of Spells*, first book in the Abolethic Sovereignty series.

Slither

Slither is a dune trader's worst nightmare. First come the waves of raiders sworn to Yarnath: elves, dragonborn, undead, and a recently pledged monstrosity of teeth and hunger. Next, the crawling fortress heaves over a nearby ridge and appears for all the world like a living monster with a tiny citadel built upon it.

Slither, the Crawling Citadel

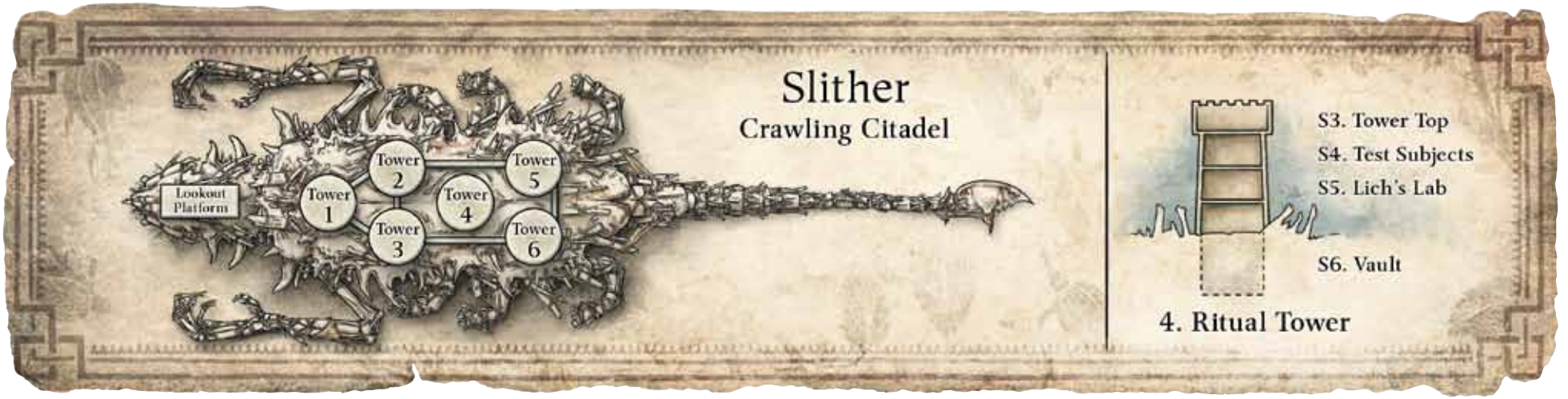
A mul defiler named Yarnath created this crawling citadel of bone. Yarnath drained his own life in the process to animate the construction, passed into undeath, and became a powerful lich.

Yarnath leads a band of raiders that primarily target trade caravans on the way to Altaruk or the Silver Spring Oasis. The lich's marauders hide their citadel a quarter-day's journey from wherever they set their ambushes, so few realize the secret of their mobile encampment. The raiders bear snake-skull tattoos.

Currently, Slither sits far from the trade routes while Yarnath experiments with the *Blood Jewel*. In fact, Yarnath has sent the bulk of his raiders south with instructions to keep up raids against small targets while the lich is otherwise engaged, which is the reason characters have a splinter of hope of sneaking into the citadel.

Picket Patrol

The patrol that normally circles Slither at irregular intervals, regardless of whether the citadel is crawling or stationary, is down from its normal complement to a single group of three cinder zombies (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 101). Characters slip past this reduced force by participating in the Entering Slither skill challenge.



Lookout Platform

Behind a half wall of fused bone spurs on Slither's "head" is flat deck suitable for a small contingent of warriors. The platform provides a protected and wide field of view of the surrounding area for Slither's guards. When Slither is moving, one of the raiders stationed on the platform directs the citadel's course. Another is responsible for targeting and activating the citadel's mouth and claws.

One inset magic circle is the driver's circle, and another controls the mouth and claws. Only someone who has been linked to a given circle through a ritual performed by Yarnath can control Slither; to others, the circle's are just powerless designs on the platform's bone surface.

During this period when Slither is not on the prowl, only a skeleton crew of five aarakocra (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 10) is stationed on the lookout platform. As described under "Picket Patrol," part of the Entering Slither skill challenge entails sneaking past these observers.

Mouth and Claws

The terrible defenses of Slither are activated and directed by a ritual-linked raider standing on the lookout platform in the proper magic circle; the citadel isn't conscious enough to direct its own attacks.

The attacks vary by the experience and level of the ritual-linked raider directing the attacks; the higher the raider's level, the higher the attack roll bonus and damage dice. For instance, if a 16th-level raider directed Slither's attacks, it would look like this:

Standard Actions
⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 5 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 +8 damage.
⸸ **Bite ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 5 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 5d6 +11 damage.

It is highly unlikely during this adventure that characters will find themselves in a position where they can be attacked with Slither's mouth or claws unless something goes horribly, horribly wrong.

The mouth, when not engaged in biting, also acts as the primary method whereby raiders enter and leave the citadel. When open, the mouth provides a passage to the basement of Tower 1, which contains a large garrison of undead raiders under Yarnath's control.

Tower Curtain

A wall of fused bone surrounds the six towers, which were built upon animated, fused mekillot carapaces. The wall is sufficient to keep out attackers, especially when Slither is under way and a full complement of raiders patrol the space between the curtain wall and towers. Currently, just a few elf raid leaders patrol the interior of the wall (*Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, page 45). Characters who participate in the Entering Slither skill challenge slink past this reduced force.

1. Yarnath's Tower

The tower is the lich's private quarters. No one goes here and lives, not even the crew.

2. Unknown Tower

Kivrin does not know the purpose or contents of this tower for certain. He suspects that it houses the magical contrivances which animate and power Slither, along with their guards and wards. You can devote this tower to any purpose you choose.

3. Armory Tower

This tower contains a vast array of armor and weapons and is under heavy guard.

4. Ritual Tower

This tower is where Yarnath performs his magical research. It is the objective of the characters' mission.

5. and 6. Green and Gold Towers

The final two towers have more barracks, the treasury, food stores, the private quarters of Yarnath's lieutenants, and other important chambers.

Encounter S1: Crossing the Desert

Encounter Level 7 (1,602 XP)

Setup

Silt sink hazard (S)
1 anakore render (A)
4 feasting zombies (F)
1 gaj mindhunter (G)

When the characters attempt to locate Slither, they must strike off into the roadless waste northeast of Tyr with Kivrin as their guide. Any trip beyond city walls requires the travelers to overcome the vicissitudes of the Athasian badlands and desert terrain.

About halfway into their journey (assuming a multiday expedition), the heroes wander into an area shaded by a large cliff where a psionic, carapaced creature known as a gaj mindhunter dwells. The gaj lairs near a silt sink (an area where the sand is filled with sucking silt), a sometimes-allied anakore render, and a few feasting zombies (past victims of the gaj mindhunter; they died much too far from their Forest Ridge homes).

Place the characters at the center of the map. They have an opportunity to notice the silt trap. Place the hazard and roll initiative. The monsters burrow up from beneath the sand, so place them on the tactical map only when their first turn comes up.

If the characters do not notice the silt trap (DC 19 Perception check), the lead character(s) walk into it, and that begins the encounter.

If the heroes notice something odd in the sand, read:

Sand stretches away in all directions, broken by ridges and boulders. You found brief relief from the sun as you walk in the shadow of a facing cliff face. Directly ahead, the sand is even finer, becoming silt.

Silt Sink Terrain Feature	Level 8 Hazard XP 350
Detect Perception DC 20	**Initiative** –
HP –	
AC –, **Fortitude** –, **Reflex** –, **Will** –	
Immune all	
Triggered Actions	
⊕ **Attack ✦ At-Will**	
Trigger: A creature enters one of the hazard's squares.	
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 0 (creature on a trigger square); +11 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d10 damage, and the target is immobilized and takes ongoing 5 damage (until escape; see "Countermeasures"). In addition, the character is at the bottom of a 30-foot-deep pit filled with silt.	
Miss: The target returns to the last space it occupied, and its move action ends.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Climb:** A trapped character can make a DC 19 escape attempt as a move action to end the immobilized condition and rise 10 feet up the silt pit or, if at the top of the silt pit, to move to the nearest square outside the pit. The character is immobilized again if still in the pit at the end of this move action.	
✦ **Rescue:** A nontrapped character who can reach someone in the pit (with a pole, a branch, or a similar tool) can spend a move action to pull a trapped creature 10 feet up the pit, or out of the pit if the trapped character is at the top.	

1 Anakore Render (A) Medium aberrant humanoid	Level 7 Brute XP 300
HP 96; **Bloodied** 48	**Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19	**Perception** +12
Speed 7 (earth walk), burrow 6	Low-light vision, tremorsense 5
Traits	
Dune Diver	
The render can charge while burrowing.	
Sensitive to Light	
When an anakore render is exposed to direct sunlight or takes radiant damage, it takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 6 damage, and the anakore pushes the target 2 squares and knocks it prone.	
⸸ **Blood Frenzy ✦ Recharge 5 6**	
Effect: The render uses *claw* twice against a bloodied or prone creature.	
Move Actions	
Blood Hunger ✦ At-Will	
Effect: The anakore shifts 3 squares and must end the shift closer to a bloodied creature than it began.	
Minor Actions	
⸸ **Rending Bite** (poison) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)	
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied or prone creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the anakore's next turn. If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 20 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 18 (+7)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 7 (+1) **Cha** 7 (+1)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech	

Tactics

If a character falls into the silt trap, the anakore attacks that character. Beneath the silt hazard (which it can ignore thanks to a combination of its burrow speed and earthwalk ability), the anakore enjoys superior cover (-5 penalty to attack rolls) and is visible only as a moving bulge.

The gaj uses its *force wave* and *invasive presence* to push more characters into the silt sink if possible, but engages those it can't push into the silt hazard with its *mandibles* and other abilities.

The feasting zombies rise and try to make a nuisance of themselves. They stay clear of the silt sink. However, the gaj mindhunter doesn't go out of its way to help, protect, or avoid hitting the feasting zombies with its *force wave*.

4 Feasting Zombies (F) Level 6 Minion Brute
Small natural humanoid (undead), halfling XP 63

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17 **Perception** +3
Speed 5 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 5 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 8 damage.

Triggered Actions

Clamping Bite Death Chomp ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The zombie drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 8 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Str 18 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 15 (+5)	**Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 6 (+1)

1 Gaj Mindhunter (G) Level 8 Elite Controller
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 700

HP 172; **Bloodied** 86 **Initiative** +5
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 22 **Perception** +6
Speed 6, burrow 3 Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Warding Shell
A gaj mindhunter gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against any creature marking it.

Standard Actions

Mandibles ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC. While the mindhunter has a creature grabbed, it can use *mandibles* against the grabbed creature only.
Hit: 4d6 + 3 damage, and the mindhunter grabs the target.

Invasive Presence (psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 4d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the mindhunter pushes the target 1 square.

Mind Wrench (charm, psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close burst 3 (one creature in the burst); +12 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). Each time the target fails a saving throw against this effect, one creature grabbed by the mindhunter takes 2d6 psychic damage.

Minor Actions

Feathery Probe (psychic) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the mindhunter); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends both). If the target is already taking ongoing psychic damage, the ongoing damage increases by 5.

Triggered Actions

Force Wave (force) **✦ Recharge** when the mindhunter hits with *feathery probe*
Trigger: The mindhunter is hit by a melee attack.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The mindhunter pushes the target 3 squares, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the mindhunter's next turn.

Skills Bluff +14; Insight +11; Stealth +10

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 13 (+5)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 11 (+4)	**Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** telepathy 10

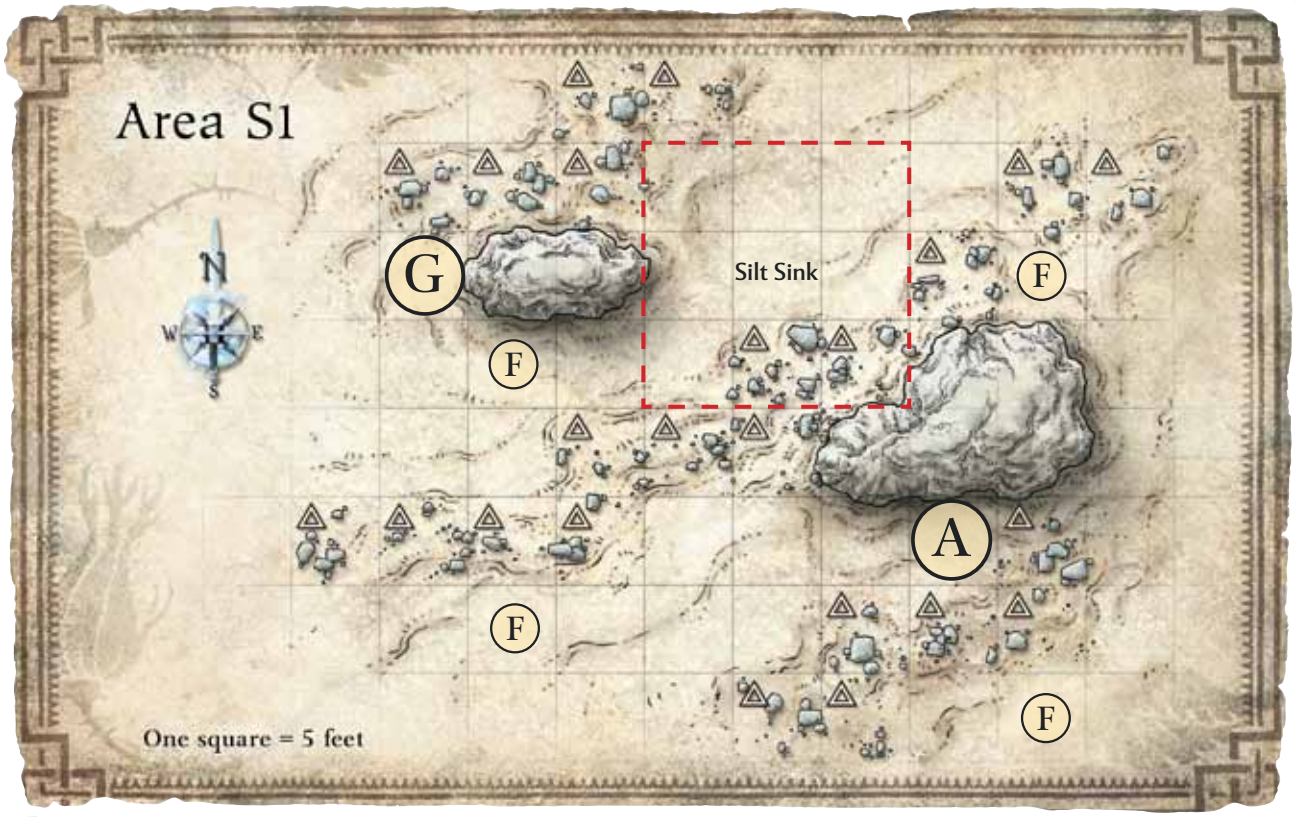
Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright, if traveling by day.

Ridged Dunes: The dune tops are difficult terrain.

Rock Outcroppings: 10 feet high, DC 15 Athletics check to climb to top.

Treasure: Digging around where the gaj mindhunter surfaced (DC 19 Perception check) uncovers a sack containing an empty water bag and several trading beads from the Forest Ridge (worth 100 gp).



Encounter S2: Entering Slither

Encounter Level 6 (1,000 XP)

Finding where Slither rests in the shadow of a massive dune is not a problem with Kivrin as a guide.

When the heroes first see Slither, read:

Slither is built from the gargantuan skeletons of several mekillot dirks bound together by beams of fused bone. Turrets and sharp spires rise crookedly from the drik-shell structure, which looks as if it has the ability to crawl across sand, scrub plains, salt flats, and ridged foothills with equal facility. It is currently quiescent and unmoving.

Finding Slither with a guide's help is one thing; getting inside is an entirely different matter. To gain entry into Slither without rousing the roving citadel's defenses, the characters must succeed on the following skill challenge. Kivrin tells characters that they must try to gain entry to Tower 4. He explains that a frontal assault on Slither would be nothing less than suicide.

Skill Challenge: Sneak into Slither

Unlike a typical skill challenge, sneaking inside Slither requires that each character gain 4 successes before the character individually gains 3 failures. This is why successful characters earn 1,000 XP instead of just 250. As characters make their way deeper into the citadel, different conditions apply to different checks (see Defenses). Throughout this skill challenge, be sure that players specify how they're using a chosen skill and that it's appropriate to both the situation and their description.

Level: 6 (XP 1,000).

Complexity: 1 for each character (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Before Entering

Each character can make one skill check as part of preparing for entry.

Secondary Skills: Endurance, Perception, Stealth.

Endurance (DC 11): The character psyches himself or herself up for a mad dash across the open sand and then the climb necessary to get onto Slither. A successful check grants no successes, but it allows the character to cancel 1 Athletics failure gained during the skill challenge.

Perception (DC 11): The character studies Slither and its layout with a critical eye, then passes on what he or she knows to allies. A successful check grants no successes, but any ally who can see and hear the character gains a +2 bonus to his or her first skill check.

Stealth (DC 15): The character prepares an adjacent character by covering his or her clothing and exposed skin with dark wrappings, dark chalk, and so on. A successful check grants no successes, but it allows the character so prepared to cancel 1 Stealth failure gained during the skill challenge.

Sneaking In

Time to get inside without raising the alarm!

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance, Nature, Perception, Stealth.

Acrobatics (DC 15; maximum 2 successes): The character relies on grace to run lightly over the sand or ascend the fused mekillot shells.

Athletics (DC 15; maximum 2 successes): The character relies on brute strength to dash across the sand, pull himself or herself up the side of the fused mekillot shells, or bash down a locked tower door.

Endurance (DC 11; maximum 1 success): The character can hang off the side of the shell for minutes until the tower guard moves to a more distant spot.

Nature (DC 15; maximum 1 success): The character makes the sound of a desert creature to distract a tower perimeter guard or allay the guard's suspicion that intruders are nearby.

Perception (DC 11; maximum 1 success): The character chooses the quickest or most sheltered route across the sand or the easiest route up the side of the shell.

Stealth (DC 15; maximum 2 successes): The character does everything as quietly as possible and sticks to the deepest shadows.

Aftermath

Success: A character who earns 4 successes before 3 failures makes it into Tower 4 of Slither (the tower Kivrin tells them to enter) and is ready to begin Encounter S3.

Failure: A character who accumulates 3 failures falls behind the other characters. When Encounter S2 starts, each character who failed the skill challenge rolls 1d4+1; the character enters the encounter at the beginning of the indicated round.

Encounter S3: Ritual Tower Top

Encounter Level 8 (1,826 XP)

Setup

1 tembo (T)
4 spiderlings (S)
2 sets of magic crossbow turret traps

The heroes sneak into Slither by climbing up the side of the construct and then up the side of the Ritual Tower to its top, as directed by Kivrin. The top of this tower provides the only access to its interior for creatures who can't walk through a portal, such as Yarnath.

The top deck of the Ritual Tower has guardians. Characters discover this fact when they arrive on the tower top. How well each character did in the Entering Slither skill challenge determines the round when that character arrives and enters the tactical map for this encounter. It's likely that at least one or two characters will clamber over the parapet a few rounds after the fighting began.

Waiting for the characters is one of those most despised of creatures: a tembo, which is a remnant magical creature from Athas's dim past. Besides the tembo, the heroes must deal with a magic trap.

The top of the map points toward Slither's head. If you know which side of the tower the characters climbed, then they enter from that side. Otherwise, roll 1d4 to determine which side of the tower the characters enter from, counting clockwise from the top.

When the first characters see the tower top, read:

This crenellated tower top is strewn with humanoid bones. Some are still fresh with gnawed meat. A horrifying, four-footed beast roams the bone piles, looking for a bit of flesh it missed. Among the older bones stretch large spider webs.

In the deck at the center of the tower is an opening onto a set of spiral stairs. Four statues of elf raiders with crossbows stand at silent attention surrounding the stairs.

Perception Check
DC 20: *The outermost row of squares around the tower's edge seems discolored. (These are the trigger plates of the crossbow traps.)*

Tactics

Once triggered, the crossbow turrets begin attacking and do not let up until nothing alive remains atop the tower. The bolts deal ongoing poison damage in addition to the standard damage, and the spiderling minions can grant and increase vulnerability to poison, so watch for that interaction.

The spiderlings are hidden amid the bone spars which support the hide roof above this area (10 feet above the deck). They are invisible until they move or attack.

The biggest threat on the tower top is of course the tembo. The creature is insidious and evil. If the characters were perceptive enough to avoid stepping on the trigger plates, the tembo steps on one to get the crossbows firing. The tembo may be surprised, however, if the first characters to arrive succeeded at the Entering Slither skill challenge and its passive Perception (18) is not high enough to detect their Stealth rolls.

The tembo's ability to take double actions on two different initiative counts means it's hard to pin down and liable to make saving throws to relieve effects. It uses its abilities to move quickly around the tower top to avoid defenders and focuses on the strikers and controllers among the player characters.

The Tembo

Everyone hates tembos. These creatures feature in stories meant to frighten children into being good. Unfortunately, tembos are not mere confabulations but all too real terrors. Tembos delight in causing ruin and heartbreak by carefully picking a means of death that creates the most anguish for the victim and his or her companions. The fact that Yarnath could put a compulsion on one to serve as his guardian to the entrance of his Ritual Tower reveals something of the lich's wide and varied power.

4 Spiderlings (S)	Level 4 Minion Skirmisher
Small natural beast (spider)	XP 44
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Tremorsense 5
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2 poison damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of the spiderling's next turn. If the target already has vulnerability to poison damage, increase the vulnerability by 2.	
Skills Acrobatics +9	
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 4 (-1)	**Cha** 7 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Tembo (T) Level 6 Solo Skirmisher
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 1,250
HP 280; **Bloodied** 140 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 **Perception** +8
Speed 8 Darkvision
Resist 5 necrotic
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

☼ **Killing Presence** (necrotic) ✦ **Aura** 2
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 necrotic damage.

☼ **Tainted Wounds** ✦ **Aura** 5
While the tembo is bloodied, enemies within the aura regain only half the normal hit points from healing effects.

Double Actions
At the start of combat, the tembo makes two initiative checks. The tembo takes a turn on both initiative counts.

Immovable
The tembo can ignore forced movement. When an attack would knock the tembo prone, the tembo can make a saving throw to remain standing.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the tembo's next turn.

⸸ **Raking Assault** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage, and the tembo shifts 4 squares and then uses *bite*.

Minor Actions

Blending (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The tembo becomes invisible until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Unspeakable Violation** (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Trigger: The tembo hits an enemy with *bite*.
Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy): +9 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target loses a healing surge, and the tembo's *killing presence* aura deals 10 necrotic damage instead of 5 necrotic damage during the tembo's next turn.

Shadow Evasion ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Trigger: An enemy hits the tembo with a melee or a ranged attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The tembo shifts 4 squares and then becomes insubstantial until the end of the triggering enemy's next turn.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 15 (+5) **Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 13 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+2)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

4 Magic Crossbow Turrets Level 1 Trap
Object **XP 100 each**
Detect Perception DC 16 (trigger plates) **Initiative** +3
HP 40 per statue
AC 5, **Fortitude** 10, **Reflex** 5, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

Activate
Trigger: A creature enters a trigger square.
Effect: Roll initiative for the trap and place it in the turn order at the indicated point.

Standard Actions

⸸ **Magic Crossbow Turret Attack** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack (Standard Action): Ranged 5 (nearest enemy); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage.

Countermeasures

✦ **Deactivate:** Thievery DC 19. *Success:* One adjacent turret is disabled. *Failure:* That turret attacks as a free action against the triggering character.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dark, assuming the characters take Kivrin's advice to sneak in when night helps hide them.

Crenellations: The top of tower is difficult terrain.

Bone Heaps: The largest bone heaps shown on the map are difficult terrain. These affect the spiderlings and tembo equally.

Statues: The statues are the attacking components of the magic crossbow trap.

Spiral Stairs: The stairs are difficult terrain for any ascending creature. The stairs spiral down to the next lower level of the Ritual Tower (S4).

Tower Exterior Wall: The outer wall is about 5 feet high and precarious. A character who remains perched atop the wall at the end of his or her turn must make a DC 12 Acrobatics check. Failure by 4 or less indicates that the character slips and falls into the adjacent deck square, landing prone. Failure by 5 or more indicates that the character slips off the outside of the tower and will fall 60 feet onto Slither's back unless a save is made.

Treasure: Searching through the bone heaps (DC 16 Perception check) yields only gory remains and useless junk.

Trigger Squares: The 24 squares which abut the parapet are the trigger squares for the trap. Once someone steps on one of these squares, the statues begin attacking. The trap is not triggered by a character jumping or flying over the squares.

Encounter S4: Test Subjects

Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP)

Setup

2 black reaver zombies (R)
1 ssurran dune mystic (S)
2 belgoi hunters (B)
4 salt zombies (Z)

Characters enter this encounter area for the first time by descending the spiral stairs.

Yarnath the Skull occasionally has need of live subjects for the experiments he conducts in his lower laboratory level. Thus he sometimes has captives brought to this chamber for confinement until they are needed.

When Yarnath is busy with other projects, however, the captives brought here perish from starvation or predation from the cell keeper ssurran dune mystic and its two belgoi hunter guards. For that reason, the barred portion of the level contains only rotting bodies and a couple of salt zombies that spontaneously formed from the dead captives in this chamber, thanks to Slither's undead ambience.

In addition to the salt zombies that lie among the dead, a few black reaver zombies also sprawl as if mere corpses, but they remain ready to spring up as aides to Yarnath if the lich appears in the circle. The black reaver zombies also defend the chamber if any invader appears.

When characters see the chamber, read:

The spiral staircase ends in this chamber, descending no farther. You see a dank, gloomy chamber layered in shadows. Candle sconces provide flickering light. One section is closed off behind bars and holds several slumped humanoid forms, some of which are obviously dead. Opposite the barred cell is a room with no door. On the forward side of the tower is a magic circle inscribed in the floor, and opposite that is a shaft leading down.

Tactics

If the characters proceed to this level after a battle on the platform above, the sound of the fighting will have alerted the creatures here that trouble is in the offing. Thus they are prepared to launch an ambush against invaders coming down the stairs.

The ssurran and the belgoi hunters hide behind the walls near the magic circle, while the black reaver zombies lie as if they were just more bodies outside the barred portion of the room.

Once three or more characters have entered the chamber, these creatures launch a surprise attack unless characters divine their presence with a DC 21 Perception check, in which case initiative is rolled normally.

The belgoi peer out from around their hiding places and use *ringing attraction* to pull the characters forward, then attack with *stakeout*.

The black reaver zombies wait for characters affected by the belgoi's *ringing attraction* to engage the belgoi and ssurran, then use *shadow burst* to teleport close to one or more characters left behind and engulf them in shadow (and use *bite*).

The ssurran dune mystic stays back, in or around the magic circle, and uses *salt cloud* and *sand's grasp* on characters, but tries not to catch allies in the blast if it can help it (though it is less concerned about the zombies than the belgoi).

The salt zombies remain in their cell unless someone opens the door. They are not likely to be especially effective against the characters.

2 Black Reaver Zombies (R)	Level 5 Lurker
Medium shadow humanoid (blind, undead)	XP 200
HP 51; **Bloodied** 25	**Initiative** +10
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16	**Perception** +2
Speed 7	Blind, blindsight 10
Immune blinded, disease, gaze, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Traits	
Scoured by Light	
When the zombie takes radiant damage, it cannot use *shadow burst* until the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage plus 1d6 necrotic damage, or plus 3d6 necrotic damage against a creature that could not see the zombie at the start of the zombie's turn.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Burst (teleportation, zone) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Effect: The zombie teleports 5 squares, and then creates a zone in a close burst 1 that lasts until the start of its next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except the zombie, and any creature other than the zombie is blinded while within the zone.	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 19 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+3)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common	

1 Ssurran Dune Mystic (S) Level 6 Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), lizardfolk XP 250
HP 72; **Bloodied** 36 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 19 **Perception** +7
Speed 6 (earth walk)

Traits

☼ **Sun Blessing** (healing) ✦ **Aura** 5
Any ally that starts its turn within the aura regains 3 hit points.

Standard Actions

⨭ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the mystic pushes the target 2 squares.

✲ **Salt Cloud** (poison) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 4 poison damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the mystic's next turn.

A **Sand's Grasp** (zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).
Effect: The burst creates a zone of difficult terrain that lasts until the end of the encounter.

Skills Athletics +10, Nature +12
Str 14 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 19 (+7)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 12 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic
Equipment bone breastplate, spear

2 Belgoi Hunters (B) Level 8 Soldier
Medium fey humanoid XP 350
HP 89; **Bloodied** 44 **Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19 **Perception** +11
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Traits

Hungry for Blood
The hunter's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against bloodied creatures.

Standard Actions

⨭ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.

⸸ **Stakeout** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature marked by the hunter); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the hunter's next turn.

Minor Actions

✧ **Ringing Attraction** (charm) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Requirement: The hunter must be holding a bell.
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +9 vs. Will
Hit: The hunter pulls the target 3 squares and marks it until the end of the hunter's next turn.

Skills Athletics +13, Stealth +12
Str 19 (+8) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 8 (+3) **Cha** 6 (+2)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, spear, bell

4 Salt Zombies (Z) Level 1 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 100
HP 28; **Bloodied** 14 **Initiative** +2
AC 17, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 12 **Perception** +0
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 5 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

⨭ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage, and the zombie grabs the target.

⸸ **Salt Feast** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage, and the zombie grabs the target. The target takes a -4 penalty to attempts to escape the grab. Each time the target attempts to escape and fails, it takes 5 damage.

Triggered Actions

Zombie Weakness
Trigger: A creature scores a critical hit against the zombie.
Effect (No Action): The zombie drops to 0 hit points.

Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 8 (–1) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 12 (+1) **Int** 1 (–5) **Cha** 3 (-4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim. Candles light the chamber.

Spiral Stairs: The stairs are difficult terrain for any ascending creature. The stairs spiral up to the top level of the Ritual Tower (encounter S3).

Teleportation Circle: This circle serves as a permanent teleportation end point for the Linked Portal ritual Yarnath sometimes performs to enter this level of the citadel from his personal tower (Tower 1). The circle has no other magical capacity, but characters could try to learn its coordinates.

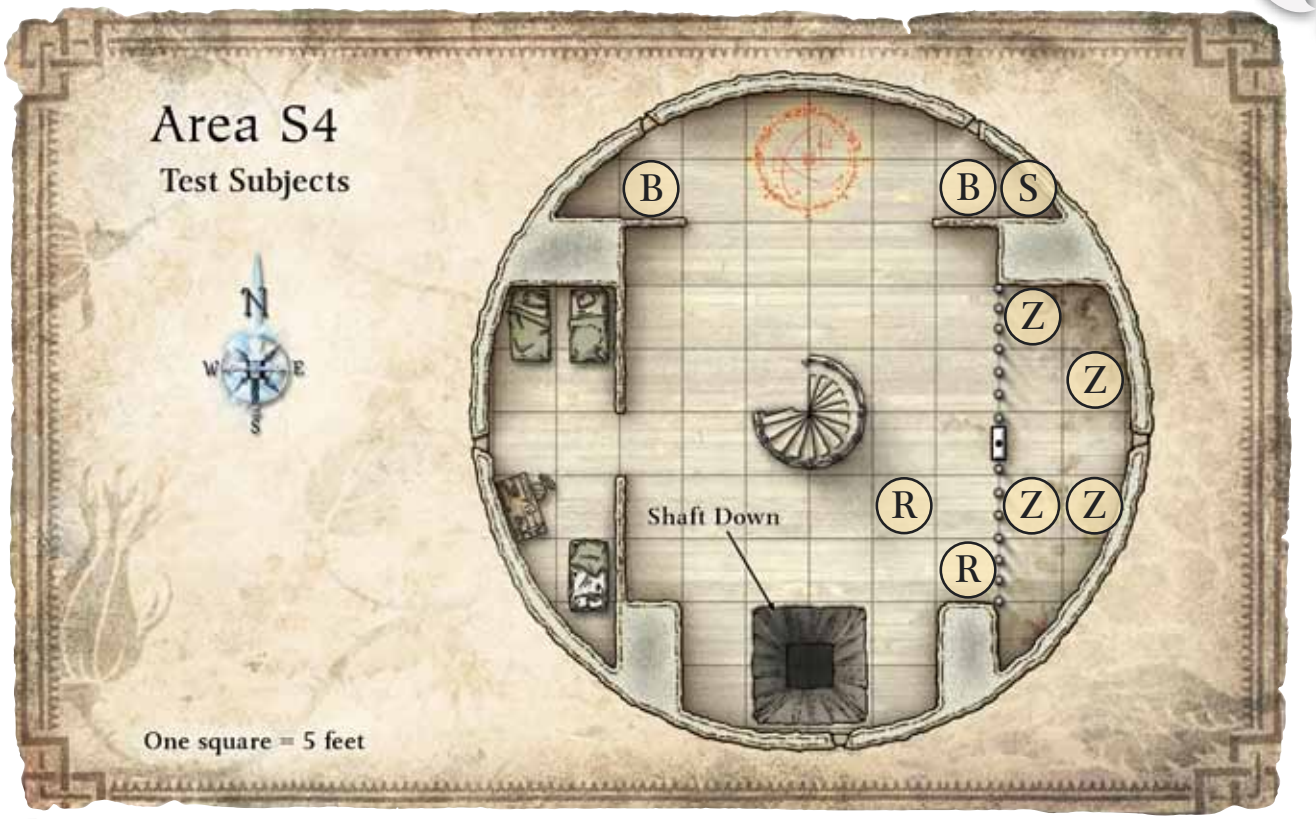
Shaft: This shaft provides precipitous access 25 feet down to the floor of the next lower level (S5). During times when live captives are kept in S4, those selected as test subjects in S5 are thrown down the shaft. To Yarnath, the freshness of the body is more important than its condition.

Climbing the shaft requires a DC 20 Athletics check.

Barred Cage: Several corpses are in this chamber, as well as 4 salt zombies, which lie quiescent unless the cell door is opened (it's currently unlocked).

Arrow Slits: These tiny openings are just wide enough to shoot arrows through.

Treasure: A search through the anteroom containing the pallets and desk turns up a total of 300 gp worth of loose coinage and gems (what the ssurran has collected from captives over the years).



Encounter S5: Lich's Laboratory

Encounter Level 6 (1,250 XP)

Setup

1 green arcanian (G)
1 dread guardian (D)
4 salt zombies (Z)
2 magic crossbow turret traps

Characters enter this encounter area for the first time by coming down the drop shaft. Unless the password is yelled down from above prior to something being dropped, the magic turrets activate and begin firing 1 round later at invaders.

In the central chamber of the laboratory level is a green arcanian; a corpse that Yarnath animated with a defiling acid spell. The corpse sticks to the necrotic circle in the lab's center because any round it doesn't start in the circle it takes 5 damage; the experiment wasn't perfect.

A dread guardian assigned to assist Yarnath is also present.

A few randomly animated salt zombies lie among the corpses near the bottom of the drop shaft.

When characters see this chamber, read:

The floor beneath the shaft is covered in remains of prisoners dropped from above and left for dead; most have decayed to bones and powdered carcasses. On either side of the shaft's detritus stand two statues of elf raiders holding crossbows. The central chamber holds all manner of strange equipment scattered on tables and shelves, including several chairs with restraints; two of them hold corpses that remain upright because of the chair's numerous straps. In the center of the chamber, a circle of sigils on the floor casts a green radiance. Within that radiance stands a corpse whose eyes are lambent green liquid. Beyond it stands a hulking corpse in moldering leather and carrying a longsword.

Tactics

The statue turrets begin firing once they are triggered and do not let up. As soon as the turrets begin to fire, the salt zombies rise, though they are likely to be of little consequence.

Of more concern is the green arcanian in its necrotic circle (see "Features of the Area"). The arcanian doesn't want to leave its circle because it loses the noted benefits and suffers the indicated consequences. However, it does so briefly if necessary.

The dread guardian tries to keep heroes distracted who might otherwise try to force the green arcanian out of the necromantic circle. For the purposes of this encounter, the green arcanian is the dread guardian's master.

1 Green Arcanian (A) — Level 8 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (undead) — **XP 350**

HP 67; **Bloodied** 33 — **Initiative** +4
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21 — **Perception** +7
Speed 6 — Darkvision

Standard Actions

Acid Touch (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 9 acid damage.

Acid Bolt (acid, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 3 acid damage, and each enemy adjacent to the target takes 3 acid damage.

Stream of Acid (acid, implement) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6+10 acid damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Orb of Denial (implement) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy makes a successful saving throw.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: The target fails the saving throw.

Arcane Surge ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The arcanian hits an enemy with an implement attack.
Effect (Free Action): The attack deals maximum damage to the enemy.

Skills Arcana +13

Str 10 (+4)	**Dex** 11 (+4)	**Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 13 (+5)	**Int** 19 (+8)	**Cha** 10 (+4)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment orb implement.

1 Dread Guardian (D) — Level 7 Soldier
Medium natural animate (undead) — XP 300

HP 79; **Bloodied** 39 — **Initiative** +6
AC 23, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +5
Speed 5 — Low-light vision

Traits

☼ **Shield of Undeath ✦ Aura** 1
While the dread guardian's master is within the guardian's aura, the master takes half damage from all attacks.

Eyes of Undeath
The dread guardian's master can see or hear anything the guardian can see or hear. The master can also speak through the guardian.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the guardian's next turn.

➶ **Longbow** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the guardian's next turn.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Iron Rebuke** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the guardian attacks the guardian's master.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 12 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 15 (+5)	**Int** 4 (+0)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** understands Common
Equipment arrow x20, heavy shield, longbow, longsword, scale armor

4 Salt Zombies (Z) — Level 1 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (undead) — XP 100 each

HP 28; **Bloodied** 14 — **Initiative** +2
AC 17, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 12 — **Perception** +0
Speed 6 — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 5 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage, and the zombie grabs the target.

⸸ **Salt Feast ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage, and the zombie grabs the target. The target takes a -4 penalty to attempts to escape the grab. Each time the target attempts to escape and fails, it takes 5 damage.

Triggered Actions

Zombie Weakness
Trigger: A creature scores a critical hit against the zombie.
Effect (No Action): The zombie drops to 0 hit points.

Str 16 (+3)	**Dex** 8 (–1)	**Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 12 (+1)	**Int** 1 (–5)	**Cha** 3 (-4)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** –

2 Magic Crossbow Turrets — Level 1 Trap
Object — XP 100 each

Detect Perception DC 16 (trigger plates) — **Initiative** +3
HP 40 per statue
AC 5, **Fortitude** 10, **Reflex** 5, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

Activate
Trigger: A creature enters a trigger square.
Effect: Roll initiative for the trap and place it in the turn order at the indicated point.

Standard Actions

⸸ **Magic Crossbow Turret Attack ✦ At-Will**
Attack (Standard Action): Ranged 5 (nearest enemy); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage.

Countermeasures

✦ **Deactivate:** Thievery DC 19. *Success:* One adjacent turret is disabled. *Failure:* That turret attacks as a free action against the triggering character.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim. Various glows from glowing fluids arranged on tables, vats, and on chairs.

Bone Heaps: The bone heaps beneath the drop shaft are difficult terrain.

Statues: These statues are the physical components of the magic crossbow turrets trap.

Spiral Stairs: The stairs are difficult terrain for any ascending creature. The stairs spiral down to the bottom level of the Ritual Tower (S6).

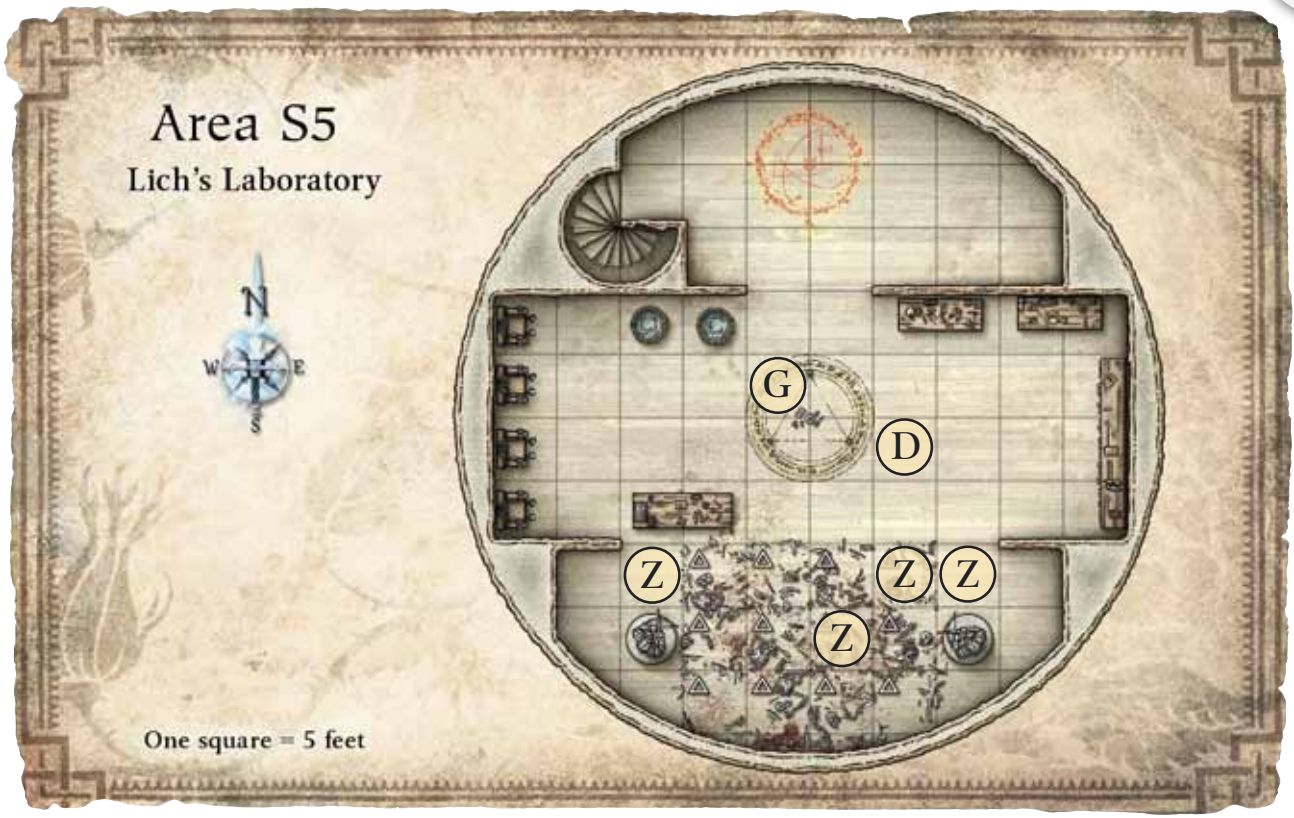
Teleportation Circle: This circle serves as a permanent teleportation endpoint for the Linked Portal ritual Yarnath sometimes performs to enter this level of the citadel from his personal tower (Tower 1). The circle has no other magical capacities, but characters could try to learn its coordinates.

Shaft: The shaft in the 10 foot high ceiling ascends an additional 15 feet to S4. Climbing the shaft is a DC 20 Athletics check.

Necrotic Circle: The necrotic circle inscribed in the center of this level grants resist 5 all and regenerate 5 to all undead within it. Due to the experimental nature of the green arcanian, it takes 5 damage every time it begins a turn outside the circle.

Lab Equipment: The tables, chairs, and vats are all difficult terrain. The chairs have straps that can restrain a humanoid (DC 25 Athletics check to break free). The shelves contain a variety of odd tomes about defiling magic and necromancy.

Treasure: A search through the tomes reveals seventeen slender books on magical theory, each worth 10 gp to the right collector.



Trigger Squares: The crossbow traps' trigger squares are in the difficult terrain at the bottom of the chute. The 8 squares around the periphery are the triggers; the 4 'inside' squares directly below the chute are not trigger squares. As with the crossbow trap in encounter S2, someone must step in a trigger square to set off the trap. Jumping or flying across a trigger square does not set it off.

Encounter S6: Vault

Encounter Level 8 (1,993 XP)

Setup

2 thri-kreen mauler (M)
11 thri-kreen bounders (B)
Yarnath's glyph of warding trap

Characters enter this encounter area by descending the spiral stairs from area S5. The three sets of doors in the lobby entry area are locked (DC 16 Thievery check to unlock) but only from the north side. They can be opened easily by a creature in the larger, south chamber.

In the center of the larger vault is a pedestal holding a glass dome where the *Blood Jewel* rests in all its red-glowing glory. The area around the pedestal (a close burst 3 area) is warded by a glyph trap. Anyone who attempts to remove the glass dome from the stone pedestal sets off the glyph (see the statistics for the glyph of warding trap and the crystal dome entry under "Features of the Area").

Several thri-kreen are stationed in this room, and more can appear through the magic circle; see "Tactics" below.

When characters see the northern, lobby chamber, read:

This chamber is bare of any decoration except a magical circle in the floor. Three sets of doors provide entry further into the tower; two are single doors, and the central one is a double door.

When characters see the larger vault area, read:

Thri-kreen infest this large chamber! It is painted with a single bizarre scene: the body of a massive snake is depicted on the wall, completely surrounding the room. On the snake's head, which is more humanoid than ophidian, rests a glowing crown. The snake's tail coils inward along the floor from the wall and rises like a stinger in the center of the chamber. The stinger forms a stone pedestal, and on it rests a red-glowing gem beneath a sealed crystal dome. Several stone chests are arrayed along the far wall.

11 Thri-Kreen Bounders (B) — Level 6 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid — XP 63 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +8
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 **Perception** +5
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Traits

Deft Dodger
The bounder gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against ranged attacks.

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 7 damage.

Chatkcha (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 6/12 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 7 damage.

Triggered Actions

Mantis Bound ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The bounder is missed by an attack.
Effect (Free Action): The bounder jumps 3 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Skills Athletics +10, Nature +10, Stealth +11
Str 14 (+5) **Dex** 17 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 13 (+4) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 10 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Thri-Kreen
Equipment leather armor, 2 chatkchas

2 Thri-Kreen Maulers (M) — Level 8 Brute
Medium natural humanoid — XP 350 each

HP 105; **Bloodied** 52 **Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 **Perception** +12
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Chatkcha (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 6/12 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 4d6 + 5 damage.

Mauler Frenzy ✦ Recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The mauler uses *claw* twice, or three times while bloodied.

Mauler Leap ✦ Recharge when first bloodied
Effect: The mauler jumps 6 squares and then uses *claw* twice. It gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls and a +4 bonus to damage rolls for these attacks. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Move Actions

Mantis Jump ✦ Encounter
Effect: The mauler jumps 6 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Minor Actions

Pain Amplification (psychic) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied creature the mauler hit this turn with *claw*); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: Ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Skills Athletics +13, Nature +12, Stealth +14
Str 18 (+8) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 8 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Thri-Kreen
Equipment hide armor, 2 chatkchas

Tactics

The thri-kreen attack as soon as someone unlocks one of the doors from the lobby area. They make no effort to block the door; in fact, they allow a clear from that

door path to the pedestal. Instead, they go around through the other doors into the lobby in order to flank the characters or get behind them, and perhaps flush them toward the pedestal.

As described under the Teleportation Circle in "Features of the Area," once the crystal dome is removed, two additional thri-kreen bounders enter the encounter every round from the teleportation circle; these thri-kreen lie in reserve in a lower level of the tower. The thri-kreen continue to appear every round until all 7 have entered.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim. The glow of the *Blood Jewel* provides dim light throughout the vault area.

Teleportation Circle: This circle serves as a permanent teleportation endpoint for the Linked Portal ritual Yarnath sometimes performs to enter this level of the citadel from his personal tower (Tower 1). Unlike teleportation circles on other levels, this one also connects to a lower level of the tower where thri-kreen are billeted. If the dome is disturbed, thri-kreen bounders appear, 2/round, until a total of 7 additional thri-kreen have appeared through the teleportation circle.

Crystal Dome on the Stone Pedestal: The stone pedestal is fused to the structure of Slither and can't be moved by any human force. The crystal dome is heavy; lifting it off the stone pedestal requires an Athletics check (DC 16). It is fragile and easily shattered if attacked. It can also be pushed off the pedestal with an attack that causes forced movement. Lifting, shattering, or moving the crystal triggers the glyph of warding trap which is centered on the pedestal and summons the additional thri-kreen bounders described above.

Blood Jewel: See this item's separate entry.

Spiral Stairs: The stairs are difficult terrain for any ascending creature. The stairs spiral up to the lich's laboratory (S5).

Treasure: The chests are not locked. If the glyph on the pedestal was not already set off, opening one of these chests triggers it. From west to east, the chests contain: a level 12 magic item; a level 11 magic item; a level 10 magic item; and a level 9 magic item, a level 8 magic item, and 15 gems each worth 100 gp.

Yarnath's Glyph of Warding Trap	Level 7 Elite Trap XP 600
Detect Perception DC 23, Arcana DC 16	**Initiative** –
HP 5	
AC 8, **Fortitude** 8, **Reflex** 8, **Will** –	
Immune acid, fire, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, all conditions, ongoing damage	
Triggered Actions	
✧ **Glyph Detonation** ✦**Encounter**	
Trigger: The crystal glass dome covering the *Blood Jewel* is removed from the pedestal or shattered.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Will	
Hit: 4d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Aftereffect: 4d6 + 4 psychic damage.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 23. *Success:* The next attempt to lift or move the crystal dome does not activate the trap. *Failure:* The trap is triggered.	
✦ **Disable:** Arcana DC 16. *Success:* The next attempt to lift or move the crystal dome does not activate the trap.	

HEROIC 1-10

The Radiant Morn

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Daniel Marthaler

Illustration by William O'Connor
Cartography by Jason A. Engle

"The Radiant Morn" is a short adventure for characters of levels 6-8 which takes place in or near the Chaos Scar. During the course of the adventure, the heroes explore the Temple of the Radiant Morn, experience firsthand the terrible truth that festers behind the sympathetic façade, and have the opportunity to foil a hidden cult of the Archdevil Baalzebul, the Lord of Flies. Level 6 characters will have a somewhat harder time with the adventure's challenges than level 8 characters would, but they should still be able to battle their way through with skilled play.

For more on the Chaos Scar and its environs, check out the Chaos Scar Introduction and its map of the valley.

If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure. The Temple of the Radiant Morn is easy to integrate into another locale or campaign. Just drop the temple near a suitable town and start playing!

Background

A few months ago, drawn by the whispers of dark power and the opportunity presented by the suffering of those living near the Scar, a devotee of Baalzebul known to his ilk as Theran of the False Truth moved into the Chaos Scar with a small band of cultists. Once situated in an abandoned cave, they set up the fake "Temple of the Radiant Morn" and began

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spreading a message of salvation from the anguish and terrible burdens of the world. Their message was tailored to appeal to the grief-stricken, the suffering, the outcast, and those with nothing to lose. While a few have found the relief and sympathy promised, they are but another means for the cult to propagate its lies, for in reality the temple is a web of deceit designed to spread the Lord of Lies' influence and lure a steady stream of victims who will not be missed to their dooms.

By now, the temple has established itself as a local institution. In an effort to widen its net from the poor and disenfranchised and draw in more powerful victims, devotees have begun spreading whispers of lost treasures and forgotten lore uncovered in the Scar. This, they hope, will attract adventurers, wandering scholars, itinerant merchants, and anyone else whose disappearance won't raise much suspicion.

Synopsis

After hearing rumors or gathering information, the adventurers make their way to the Temple of the Radiant Morn. There they meet a warm welcome and are invited to speak with the head of the temple. Upon moving further into the temple, the characters are ambushed by the cultists. The heroes must fight their way through offal-filled caverns against cultists, their disgusting pets, and deluded peasants before facing the head of the cult.

Getting the Players Involved

Below are a few story hooks to draw the players into investigating the Temple of the Radiant Morn.

Commonly-Heard Rumors

Anyone who spends time in a nearby town (such as Restwell Keep) will hear that a few months ago, a priest who is a stranger to this region arrived with a small band of followers. They found a cave a few miles from the nearest settlement, cleaned it out, and set up the Temple of the Radiant Morn. They spread a message of salvation and relief from worldly woe which has found wide acceptance.

After some resistance, the locals have grown accustomed to the presence of the temple and its disciples. Its message is nonthreatening, even comforting.

Hook 1: Limping Johann

A beggar, Limping Johann, approaches the characters to barter something he heard on the street that might be of interest to the adventurers for a stiff drink, a bite to eat, or a few copper coins. If the characters oblige, Johann tells them that "the boys from the temple" have been letting drop that they might know something about ancient treasures lost within the Chaos Scar. If the characters ask him about the temple, Johann refers to them as a bunch of naïve do-gooders, but he can give accurate directions to the Temple of the Radiant Morn in exchange for another small gift. (The rumors of treasure are false. This is a ruse the cultists use to draw victims to the temple. The temple itself does not hold much treasure because up to this time, most of its victims have been poor.)

Hook 2: An Unknown Quantity

A local priest (if your characters are using Restwell Keep as a base for exploring the Scar, this priest could be Chendera, or even Benwick) is unsettled by the rumors he has heard of a "Temple of the Radiant Morn" springing up within the Chaos Scar. He has never before heard of any such religious group and fears that it could be up to no good, despite its message of charity and brotherly love. What's more, he has heard from beggars in town that some of their friends who went to the temple "just for a look" have never come back. That could be nothing—but if the characters find themselves traveling near the temple and have a chance to look into it, he would like to know what's really going on. Optionally, characters might themselves overhear beggars discussing this situation and swapping theories about the disappearances.

Quest XP: 1,500 XP for routing or destroying the cult (including Theran) and bringing news of it to Canard.

Hook 3: The Missing Merchant

A local trader who fancies himself something of an amateur adventurer approaches the characters and tries to hire them as muscle for his "big score." (This may be Bosco Heldam in a Chaos Scar campaign.) He confides in them that there's treasure to be had out at the Temple of the Radiant Morn, and he intends to have it. This information came to him through "reliable channels" which he refuses to share.

Don't make the offer too attractive; it should be clear that he's an amateur who has fallen for a hoax and now has the fever of easy gold. A bit of asking around reveals that this trader has disappeared on similar wild-goose chases before only to come home a few days later, hungry and mud-smeared and vowing never to go adventuring again.

Alternatively, the characters might overhear him making the same offer to some other group of bravos or toughs, accompanied by much whispering and looking over his shoulder.

A week or more after the characters turn him down, his friends or wife approach the characters to ask for help because the merchant has never been gone this long before. The characters could also be approached without ever having seen or heard the merchant, after his disappearance.

Quest XP: 1,500 XP for bringing the merchant home alive.

Treasure

Characters can gain three treasures during the course of exploring the Temple of the Radiant Morn. The most likely places to find treasure and what it might consist of are listed below. The magic items should be from the players' wish lists. Of course, DMs are free to substitute their own treasures for these or generate new treasure parcels using the methods on pages 298-302 of the *Rules Compendium* or pages 124-127 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Parcel 1–*Fleecing the Flock* (carried or dropped in haste by a false priest): Six 100 gp gems (moonstones) and 250 gp

Parcel 2–*The Living Filth* (found in the black pudding's remains): One level 9 magic item

Parcel 3–*The Lord of Flies* (amid Theran's shredded, cast off clothing): One level 10 magic item, one 500 gp gem (black pearl), and 700 gp

Dungeon Tiles

All of the maps in this adventure were constructed using dungeon tiles from one set of *Caves of Carnage* (DU3) and one set of *Fane of the Forgotten Gods* (DT7).

Getting Started

After hearing a few rumors or being approached by NPCs, characters might try to dig up their own information on the Temple of the Radiant Morn by making Religion and Streetwise checks. Although the name implies some connection to Pelor, no player character trying a Religion check recalls ever hearing of a temple calling itself the Radiant Morn (but be sure to purse your lips and think about this for a moment before announcing the result of the roll). A DC 11 Streetwise check, however, finds plenty of locals willing to confirm that the temple's disciples work to relieve the suffering of the worst off, and a DC 16 check finds one who can give reasonably clear directions to its location.

When heroes arrive at the temple, read or paraphrase the following:

Ahead of you, the rough mouth of a cave yawns wide to reveal what appears to be the interior of a chapel or temple. Inside, a small crowd of gaunt, unkempt, and generally miserable-looking people kneel on the stone floor or mill about quietly. A pair of white-robed figures moves through them, seemingly offering quiet words of reassurance or sympathetic gestures. Traces of strong, musky incense are carried upon the breeze.

If the characters stand and watch for more than a few minutes, or when they enter the temple, read or paraphrase the following:

Upon seeing you, one of the robed figures turns and gestures widely, saying "Welcome to the Temple of the Radiant Morn, travelers. Within these walls, solace and understanding are freely given." You see that the speaker and the other white-robed figure are both male humans.

If the characters ask about the temple or its purpose, the speaker responds:
"We offer compassion, understanding, and what relief we can from the heavy burdens of this world. The hungry are fed, the weary rested, the grieving counseled, and the ill tended. What is it that you seek?"

Regardless of how the characters respond, the speaker soon becomes determined to lure them into the next chamber. **Read or paraphrase the following:**
"I am afraid my duties are here, tending to those in need. Perhaps you should speak with the head of our order. I am sure he will be glad to help you." The priest motions for you to follow as he moves toward the doors across the chapel. He sounds a small gong beside the doorway before turning back to you: "Our brothers will meet you within to show you the way."

The speaker (Kalin) will not accompany the characters through the doorway. If urged to, he insists that he must stay and attend to the congregation. Kalin sticks to the established story if the adventurers have more questions but always turns the conversation back to meeting the head of the order, Theran.

Suspicious or wary characters might ask for Insight checks while speaking with Kalin. He is a practiced liar; an Insight check or passive Insight score of 16 generates the feeling that the priest is not as excited about tending to a crowd of needy beggars as his well-rehearsed speech would indicate. A result of 23 or more reveals that something other than brotherly courtesy may be motivating his insistence on ushering the characters through the doorway.

If the characters refuse to enter the temple's inner chamber, confront Kalin for being a liar, or become hostile and aggressive, then the priest excuses himself to whisper briefly with his associate. At that time, the pair turns upon the characters and encounter T2 begins immediately. Otherwise, if the characters advence through the doorway, move ahead to encounter T1.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the characters have cleared each of the encounters, they have convincingly routed the cultists. With the Temple of the Radiant Morn exposed and its members and leadership dead or fleeing, the threat it posed is ended for the foreseeable future.

Whether that is the last time the characters will confront the cult of Baalzebul is up to you. Cultists who escaped might plot their individual revenge or flee to another hidden stronghold of the Lord of Lies and marshal the archdevil's followers against the temple destroyers. In particular, if Theran escapes, his ability to don illusionary disguises could make him a deadly and hateful foe. Either path could lead to more adventures.

About the Author

Daniel Marthaler is an avid gamer with soaring delusions of grandeur and dreams of breaking into the industry. Despite being 6' 3", he has a peculiar love of the wee races that populate the game, most notably gnomes and kobolds.

T1: A Warm Reception

Encounter Level 7 (1,500 XP)

Setup

2 orc reavers (R)
2 orc storm shamans (S)
2 otyughs (O)
Offal-Filled Pit Trap

The characters are ambushed by members of the Temple of the Radiant Morn who were sent to be their escorts. Place only the two storm shamans at first; the reavers are hidden behind curtains and the otyughs are in the offal-filled pit.

When heroes enter the room, read:
Two members of the Temple wait for you as promised. As you move into the room, you perceive that the heavy aroma of incense in this chamber masks another, fouler smell. No sooner do you notice that than the white-robed figures throw back their hoods to reveal that they are snarling orcs ready to attack!

If players declared their suspicions before entering this room or are acting in an obviously wary manner, then those with passive Insight of 16 or higher are immediately aware of an unfriendly tenseness within the temple priests and are not surprised. Otherwise, they are surprised. The temple guardians are not surprised.

Regardless of whether they're surprised, characters with passive Perception of 16 or higher hear rustling from the alcoves and become aware that something is hidden behind the curtains when initiative is rolled.

Tactics

The storm shamans hope to lure rash characters into the pit trap. They begin the fight with their *vengeful whirlwinds* in an effort to slide characters into the pit, then switch to *lightning strikes*.

The reavers use their javelins immediately, also with the goal of pushing characters into the pit or the flaming braziers.

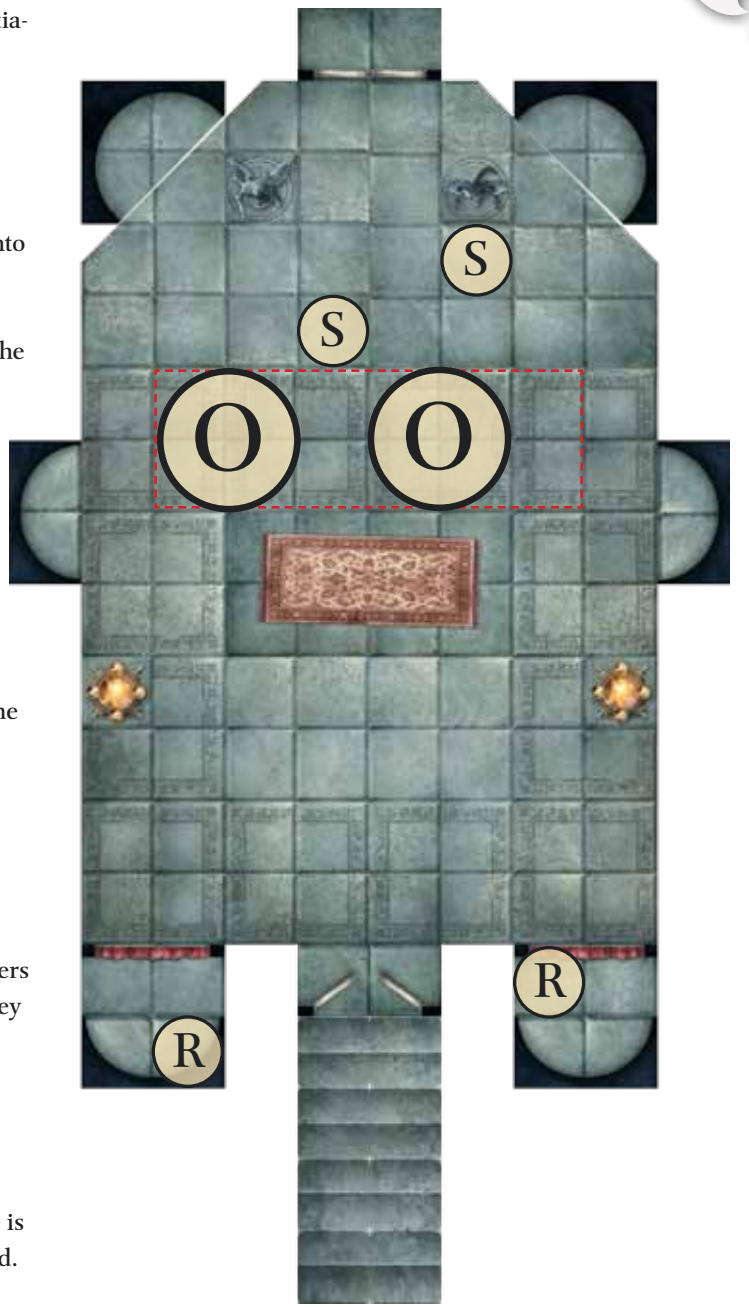
The otyughs hide within the pit, waiting to attack any hero unfortunate enough to fall in. Once the trap has been sprung, the otyughs also try to grab and pull into the pit any character that moves within reach of their *tentacles*. Because the pit is 10 feet deep, an otyugh in it can reach only 2 squares outside the pit with its *tentacles* and can't *bite* a target that is outside the pit. An otyugh leaves the pit only if this would be the third round when it has no targets within reach.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The two braziers provide bright light in the chamber. If both braziers are dumped over, the illumination becomes dim.

Curtains: The curtains concealing the orc reavers block line of sight but do not hinder movement. They can be drawn open or closed with a minor action.

Pit of Offal: A covered pit is hidden near the center of the room. Fragile timbers support flagstones which match the rest of the floor. The pit is 10 feet deep, and its bottom is covered with liquid filth to a depth of about 3 feet. The stinking sludge is difficult terrain for creatures without a swim speed. Creatures other than otyughs in the offal take a -2



penalty to attack rolls, AC, and Reflex, and creatures other than otyughs that start their turn in the offal take 5 poison damage.

Statues: The statues provide cover and are difficult terrain.

Braziers: The two large, shallow braziers are filled with flaming, scented oil. A creature that moves (or is forced to move) into a square containing a brazier takes 5 fire damage and the brazier is knocked over. Once a brazier is knocked over, it no longer has any effect.

Development

After this fight, the characters can either head back to the temple entrance (encounter T2) or they can push deeper into the temple (encounter T3; leave T2 for when the characters exit the temple).

2 Orc Reavers (R) — **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging) — Low-light vision

Traits

Charging Mobility
While charging, the orc gains a +4 bonus to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Battleaxe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage.
Effect: After the attack, the orc can shift 1 square.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the orc can push the target 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Blood-Crazed Charge ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The orc hits an enemy.
Effect (Free Action): The orc charges an enemy.

Savage Demise
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.

Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 17 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment hide armor, battleaxe, 4 javelins

2 Orc Storm Shamans (S) — **Level 6 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 250 each

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 — **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +6
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Scimitar (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage.

Lightning Strike (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 8 lightning damage, and one enemy within 5 squares of the target takes 5 lightning damage.

Vengeful Whirlwind (lightning, thunder, zone) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in burst); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 4 lightning and thunder damage, and the target falls prone. Then the shaman slides the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and the shaman can slide the target 1 square.
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the orc's next turn. Any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 thunder and lightning damage.

Triggered Actions

Wind Walk ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The shaman is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): Until the end of the encounter, the shaman gains a fly speed of 8 but must land or fall at the end of each move.

Savage Demise
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 12 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment hide armor, scimitar

2 Otyughs (O) **Level 7 Soldier**
Large natural beast XP 300 each

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 **Initiative** +5
AC 23, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 19 **Perception** +11
Speed 5, swim 5 **Darkvision**

Traits

☼ **Otyugh Stench ✦ Aura** 1
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Tentacle ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the otyugh pulls the target up to 2 squares and grabs it (escape DC 16).

⸸ **Diseased Bite** (disease) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, or 1d10 + 12 against a creature grabbed by the otyugh. In addition, at the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts lesser otyugh filth fever (stage 1).

Skills Stealth +13
Str 22 (+9) **Dex** 11 (+3) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 18 (+7) **Int** 1 (-2) **Cha** 5 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Offal Filled Pit **Level 6 Trap**
Object XP 250

Detect Perception DC 23 **Initiative** –
HP 20 per square
AC 5, **Fortitude** 10, **Reflex** 5, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

⊕ **Attack ✦ At-Will**
Trigger: A creature enters a trapped square or starts its turn there.
Attack (Free Action): Melee 0 (creature in trapped square); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: Target falls into the pit, takes 1d10 damage plus 1d10 poison damage, and falls prone.
Miss: Target moves to nearest unoccupied, untrapped square and its move action ends immediately.

Countermeasures

✦ **Collapse Floor:** Any successful attack against a trapped square which causes forced movement collapses that square of floor.
✦ **Trigger Prematurely:** Thievery DC 13. *Success:* An adjacent character collapses one square of the trap, leaving the open pit.
✦ **Climb Out:** Athletics DC 18. *Success:* The character climbs 10 feet to an adjacent, untrapped square.

Lesser Otyugh Filth Fever **Level 7 Disease**

Those infected by this disease waste away as they alternately suffer chills and hot flashes.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses a healing surge. The target also takes a-2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex.
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points. The target also takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.
Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the disease increases by 1.
Easy DC: No change.
Moderate DC: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

T2: Fleecing the Flock

Encounter Level 8 (1,800 XP)

Setup

3 rot grub swarms (S)
2 human transmuters (T)
9 human thugs (H)

The two false priests have moved from comforting the wretched to preaching the message of the Temple of the Radiant Morn. They are weaving the skillful webs of lies so loved by their dark lord, and their audience listens in glassy-eyed rapture. Describe the rest of the scene and alter the read-aloud text depending on how the characters arrived at this point in the adventure. Thanks to their paranoia, the two false priests are always on the lookout and won't be surprised.

Do not place the rot grub swarms at the beginning of the fight; they emerge from hiding only after the struggle is underway.

When the characters enter, read:

Gesturing sharply your way, the speaker skillfully weaves your arrival into his speech without missing a stride: "See how the world assails us? The source of your suffering is revealed. Cruel intruders have come to smash our good works and rob us of what little we have! They believe they can take whatever they want with their weapons and their magic! Defend yourselves, oh brothers! Stand up against their greed!"

Tactics

The thugs are enthralled by the rhetoric of the false priests (transmuters) and hurl themselves against the characters recklessly until the transmuters are both killed, at which point the thugs flee back to the nearest village.

The transmuters are happy to use the thugs as shields. They are keenly aware of the braziers' effect and attempt to keep their foes within it while remaining clear themselves. They are cowards at heart, so once they are bloodied or all their minions are dead, the transmuters become more interested in getting away than continuing the fight.

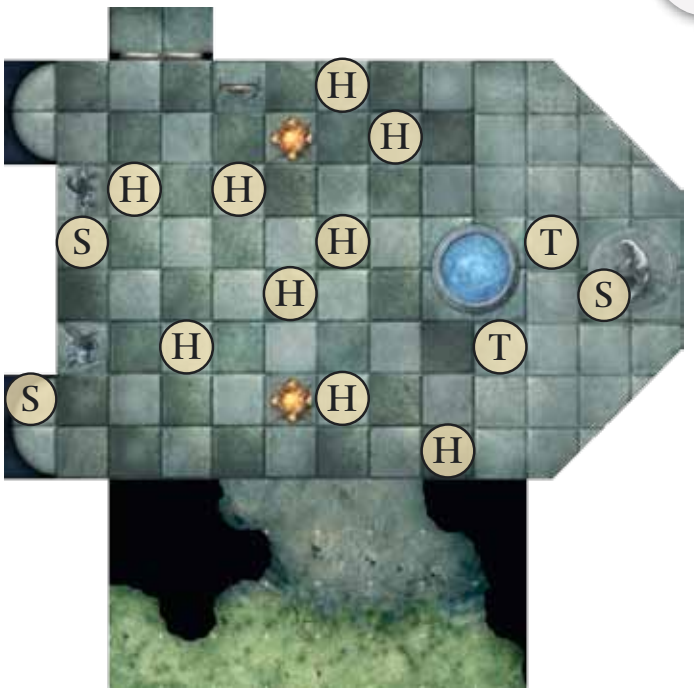
The rot grubs appear at the start of the second turn and immediately swarm forward to make the most of their auras. They fight to the death.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The braziers, votive candles, and light streaming in through the mouth of the cave provide bright light throughout the area.

Braziers: The thick, musky incense burning in the two braziers is enchanted by the cultists of Baalzebul to do more than just cover the temple's stench: a creature within 2 squares of a brazier takes a -2 penalty to Will defense as the fog saps their mental resistance. A creature that moves through a square containing a brazier takes 5 fire damage and the brazier is knocked over. Once knocked over, the square can be navigated safely. A brazier can also be knocked over intentionally with a DC 15 Strength check as a standard action. This dumps the oil into any square adjacent to the brazier and deals 5 fire damage to any creature occupying that square.

Gong: The gong has no special effect.



Pool: A low wall of stone surrounds the small pool. It counts as difficult terrain and provides cover.

Statues: The statues provide cover and are difficult terrain.

Development

The worshipers (human thugs) are not evil; most of them are no more than beggars and wanderers who came to the temple seeking food and some kindness. They fight back because they believe that the characters are here to loot their temple. If characters gleefully slaughter these innocents, look for ways to make them regret their cruelty later. You'll have a prime opportunity if survivors flee back to the village with news of an "unprovoked massacre" at the temple.

3 Rot Grub Swarms (R) **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural beast (swarm) XP 175 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15 **Perception** +2
Speed 5 Darkvision
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks;
Vulnerable 10 against close and area attacks

Traits

☼ **Swarm Attack** ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 damage plus 2 extra damage for each additional rot grub swarm adjacent to the enemy.

Swarm
The rot grub swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The rot grub swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.

Clumsy Attacker
The rot grub swarm lacks a melee basic attack.

Standard Actions

Infesting Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: Ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: Ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: Ongoing 15 damage (save ends).

Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 13 (+3)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-2)	**Cha** 4 (-1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

2 Human Transmuters (T) **Level 7 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 300 each

HP 77; **Bloodied** 38 **Initiative** +3
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +11
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Staff** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage.

Capricious Earth (charm, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 5 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Will
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the transmuter slides the target up to 3 squares.
Miss: The transmuter can slide the target 1 square.

Beast Curse (implement, polymorph) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 5 (one hexed enemy); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The transmuter alters the target's physical form to appear as a Tiny animal until the end of the transmuter's next turn. While in this form, the target cannot use powers or make attacks.

Move Actions

Hex Jump (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Close burst 5 (one hexed creature in the burst). The transmuter and the target teleport, swapping positions.

Minor Actions

Hex (charm, implement) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Close burst 5 (one enemy in the burst); +10 vs. Will
Hit: The target is hexed until the end of the transmuter's next turn. While hexed, the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and damage rolls against the transmuter.

Skills Arcana +10, Nature +11

Str 10 (+3)	**Dex** 11 (+3)	**Wis** 17 (+6)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 15 (+5)	**Cha** 14 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment staff, robes

9 Human Thugs (H) **Level 7 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 75 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +4
Speed 6

Traits

Rush into Battle
Whenever the thug hits a creature with a charge attack, the target grants combat advantage until the end of the thug's next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 7 damage.

Str 14 (+5)	**Dex** 11 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 13 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club

T3: The Living Filth

Encounter Level 7 (1,600 XP)

Setup

1 black pudding (B)
3 carrion crawlers (C)

The vile filth created as both a sign and a byproduct of the cult's devotion to the slug archduke slowly pooled here, where its corruption and foul magic condensed over time until it imbued the sludge with a terrible semblance of life. Now the cultists use the abomination and the carrion eating aberrations that took up residence to dispose of inconvenient objects or people.

All of the monsters begin the encounter out of sight, so place them on the battle mat only when the adventurers gain line of sight to them.

When the characters enter the room, read:
The air of this cavern is foul from the stagnant river of stinking filth that flows across the chamber.

Passive Perception 16: The character becomes aware that something lurks in the cavern, without knowing what or where. Characters who are alerted this way can then make active Perception checks against DC 23; place one carrion crawler or the black pudding on the map for each successful check, even if they are out of sight. Make appropriate adjustments for characters who enter the room especially cautiously or recklessly

Tactics

The black pudding floats unmoving beneath the surface of the sludge, readying an action until a character wades into or jumps over the pool. At that point, it bursts from the muck to *engulf* the unfortunate adventurer. From then on, it *engulfs* and sustains the grab against as many adventurers as possible. Black pudding spawn attack characters at random.

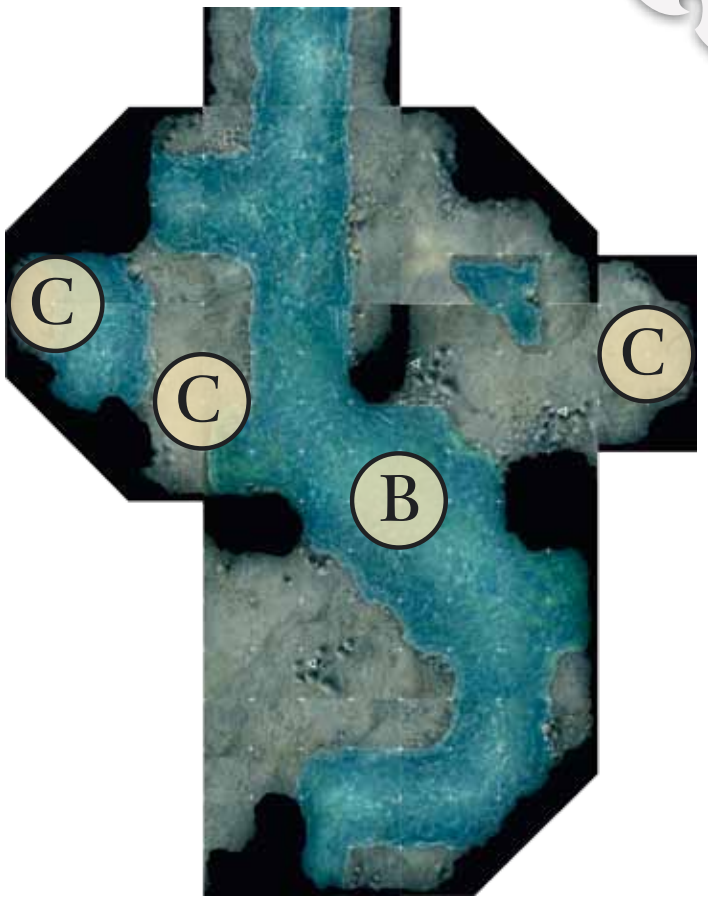
The carrion crawlers are aware of the black pudding's hunting methods and stay hidden until the pudding attacks. Then they rush forward along the floor, walls, and ceiling. They are quite fond of using *tentacle* to strand heroes within the poisonous stream or adjacent to the ooze. They fall back on their *bite* only when every target within reach is slowed or immobilized.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness. The only sources of light are those the characters bring with them.

Pools of Offal: The pools and streams of stinking liquid and foul sludge count as difficult terrain to creatures without a swim speed. Creatures other than the black pudding and its spawn in the offal take a -2 penalty to attack rolls, AC, and Reflex. Additionally, creatures that start their turn in the offal take 5 poison damage. Remember that the carrion crawlers can use the walls and ceiling as readily as the floor.

Shackles: The cultists sometimes keep prisoners chained here so they can witness the terrible fate awaiting them when the ooze and carrion crawlers messily consume (or dissolve) other captives. The chains hang empty at this time.



Black Pudding (B) **Level 8 Elite Brute**
Large natural beast (blind, ooze) XP 700

HP 218; **Bloodied** 109 **Initiative** +6
AC 20, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18 **Perception** +4
Speed 4, climb 3 Blind, tremorsense 10
Immune blinded, gaze effects; **Resist** 15 acid
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Ooze
While squeezing, the pudding moves at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the -5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.

Standard Actions

Slam (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 6 acid damage.
Effect: Before or after the attack, the pudding shifts up to its speed.

Engulf (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 6 acid damage, and the pudding grabs the target (escape DC 16).

Melt (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the pudding). The target takes 2d6 + 15 acid damage and loses a healing surge. It takes 10 extra acid damage if it has no healing surges.

Triggered Actions

Split ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the pudding with a weapon attack.
Effect (No Action): A black pudding spawn appears in the unoccupied square closest to the pudding.

Str 15 (+6)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 1 (-1)	**Cha** 1 (-1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Black Pudding Spawn **Level 8 Minion Brute**
Medium natural beast (blind, ooze) XP 88

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +6
AC 20, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18 **Perception** +4
Speed 4, climb 3 Blind, tremorsense 10
Immune blinded, gaze effects; **Resist** 15 acid

Traits

Ooze
While squeezing, the pudding moves at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the -5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.

Standard Actions

Slam (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 10 acid damage, and the pudding shifts up to its speed.

Str 15 (+6)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 1 (-1)	**Cha** 1 (-1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

3 Carrion Crawlers (C) **Level 7 Soldier**
Large aberrant beast XP 300 each

HP 81; **Bloodied** 40 **Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17 **Perception** +5
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb) Darkvision

Standard Actions

Tentacles (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d4 + 5 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is stunned instead of immobilized (save ends).
Miss: The target is slowed until the end of the carrion crawler's next turn.

Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage.

Str 20 (+8)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 17 (+6)	**Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 16 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

T4: The Lord of Flies

Encounter Level 10 (2,500 XP)

Setup

Theran of the False Truth (T)
2 orc reavers (R)
2 orc storm shamans (S)
2 otyughs (O)

This is the heart of the Temple of the Radiant Morn, where the cultists conduct their foul rituals in the name of Baalzebul the Fallen One, Lord of Flies. It is also the source of the noxious sludge found throughout the dungeon.

The otyughs begin in hiding; place the beasts only when the characters spot them.

Theran, the leader of the temple, appears human when the characters meet him. At the moment when he first takes damage, his illusory appearance dissolves to reveal him for what he is: a charnel otyugh gifted with high Intelligence. When that happens, provide a suitable description of tentacles bursting through clothing, the head reshaping into a gaping maw, and the body swelling into a bloated monstrosity, all accompanied by a burst of terrible stench, questionable fluids, and thousands of biting insects which swarm around him.

When the adventurers enter the room, read:
The already nauseating stench becomes even worse as you enter this vaulted cavern. A statue of a gigantic, sluglike creature vomits forth a continual stream of the vile filth which fills this place. Runes surrounding its corroded mouth hurt the eye to look upon.

You become aware of a low, humming noise; it is the sound of thousands of buzzing flies!

Four cultists wearing tattered, befouled robes chant from the bank of the stream of filth. They are led by a surprisingly handsome human dressed in sumptuous and incongruously immaculate clothing. He turns and says, "We receive more offerings for Baalzebul, our patron. Let the Lord of Maladomini embrace them!"

Perception DC 16: The character spots the beady eyes and twitching tentacles of an otyugh hiding in the sludge. If at least three characters succeed on this roll, place both otyughs.

Insight DC 23: The character senses that Theran is not what he appears to be.

Arcana or Religion DC 16: The character recognizes the name of Baalzebul, one of the Lords of the Nine who rule over the Nine Hells. Known as the Lord of Lies, the Lord of Flies, and (not within his hearing) the Slug Archduke, Baalzebul is a disgusting, sluglike being of filth that rules the seventh hell, Maladomini.

Tactics

Theran uses only *charnel frenzy* to attack until he is forced to reveal his hidden nature by taking damage (his aura is always in effect). Once his subterfuge is stripped away, he uses all of his attacks to full effect; *charnel lash* is especially useful for pulling characters into the sludge.

Theran expects his cultists to die for him, and they probably will, but he has no such intention for himself. When it becomes apparent that the battle is lost, Theran will do his best to escape, either by rushing down the hideous stream or even squeezing himself up the filth-spewing pipe in the statue. Abandoning his followers to certain doom in order to save his oozing hide is a price he's willing to pay.

The orcs may be nearly as surprised by Theran's transformation as the player characters are, but they don't pause in their attacks. They push characters into the sludge or within range of the otyughs whenever possible. Each bolt of lightning fills the cavern with the odor of singed muck, and each whirlwind swirls tiny droplets of stinking liquid into the already foul air. These things have no particular effect, but be sure to emphasize how nauseating this encounter is.

The otyughs lurk in the stream of slime with their squishy bodies flattened beneath the surface. When a target comes within range, they burst from hiding and spend the rest of the encounter trying to drag tasty morsels into the sludge.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Candles, torches, and glowing runes keep the area in bright light.

River of Offal: The stream of stinking liquid counts as difficult terrain to creatures without a swim speed. Creatures other than otyughs in the stream take a -2 penalty to attack rolls, AC, and Reflex; creatures other than otyughs that start their turn in the stream take 5 poison damage.

Slug Statue: Despite the enchantments that keep corruption pouring endlessly from the statue's mouth, the statue itself has no effect on the encounter besides the mundane attributes common to all statuary.

Shackles: Sacrificial victims are kept chained in this chamber until needed. If the characters are looking for the missing trader (Hook 3), they find him here, beaten and unconscious but alive. Otherwise, all the shackles are empty.

Development

By the end of this fight, the characters are thoroughly drenched in reeking filth. If they return to town without cleaning up—a task that can take several hours, and they might never get the stench out of some clothing—they will be met with nothing but disgust no matter how successful their expedition was.

If the characters have not yet defeated encounter **T2**, then they will find the exit to the dungeon occupied by the false priests and their enthralled parishioners. None of these are particularly loyal to Theran himself, so his demise (or flight) does not concern them; they fight or flee as described in that encounter, with the intention of either claiming the temple for their own use or at least escaping with their lives.

Theran of the False Truth/ charnel otyugh (T) — **Level 10 Elite Soldier**
Large natural beast — **XP 1,000**

HP 212; **Bloodied** 106 — **Initiative** +7
AC 26, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 24 — **Perception** +13
Speed 5, swim 5 — Darkvision
Resist 5 necrotic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Otyugh Stench** ✦ **Aura** 1
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Charnel Lash** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). The otyugh pulls the target up to 2 squares and grabs it (escape DC 18).

⸸ **Rotting Bite** (disease, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 6 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). In addition, at the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts greater otyugh filth fever (stage 1).

✧ **Charnel Frenzy** (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

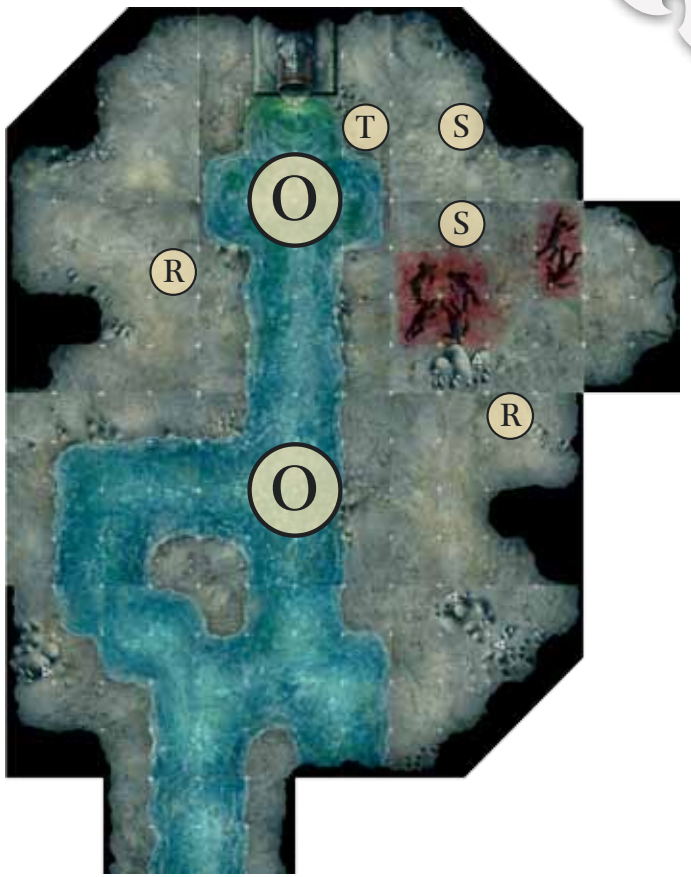
Minor Actions

⸸ **Life Leech** (healing, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature grabbed by the otyugh); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 10 necrotic damage, and the otyugh regains 5 hit points.

Skills Stealth +10

Str 22 (+11)	**Dex** 11 (+5)	**Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	**Int** 12 (+6)	**Cha** 5 (+2)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common



2 Orc Reavers (R) **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 **Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging) Low-light vision

Traits

Charging Mobility
While charging, the orc gains a +4 bonus to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Battleaxe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage.
Effect: After the attack, the orc can shift 1 square.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the orc can push the target 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Blood-Crazed Charge ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The orc hits an enemy.
Effect (Free Action): The orc charges an enemy.

Savage Demise
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.

Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 17 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment hide armor, battleaxe, 4 javelins

2 Orc Storm Shamans (S) **Level 6 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid XP 250 each

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Scimitar (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage.

Lightning Strike (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 8 lightning damage, and one enemy within 5 squares of the target takes 5 lightning damage.

Vengeful Whirlwind (lightning, thunder, zone) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in burst); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 4 lightning and thunder damage, and the target falls prone. Then the shaman slides the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and the shaman can slide the target 1 square.
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the orc's next turn. Any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 thunder and lightning damage.

Triggered Actions

Wind Walk ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The shaman is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): Until the end of the encounter, the shaman gains a fly speed of 8 but must land or fall at the end of each move.

Savage Demise
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 12 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment hide armor, scimitar

2 Otyughs (O) **Level 7 Soldier**
Large natural beast XP 300 each

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 **Initiative** +5
AC 23, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 19 **Perception** +11
Speed 5, swim 5 **Darkvision**

Traits

Otyugh Stench ✦ **Aura** 1
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.

Standard Actions

Tentacle ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the otyugh pulls the target up to 2 squares and grabs it (escape DC 16).

Diseased Bite (disease) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, or 1d10 + 12 against a creature grabbed by the otyugh. In addition, at the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts lesser otyugh filth fever (stage 1–see Encounter T1).

Skills Stealth +13

Str 22 (+9)	**Dex** 11 (+3)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 1 (-2)	**Cha** 5 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Greater Otyugh Filth Fever **Level 11 Disease**

Those infected by this disease waste away as they alternately suffer chills and hot flashes.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses a healing surge and takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex.
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points. The target also takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.
12 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.
13-18: No change.
19 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Ecology of the Scarecrow

By Steve Townshend

illustration by Adam Gillespie

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At harvest time, when death revisits the twilight world and summer's blossoms bow their withered heads, eerie scarecrows loom in silent vigil over the domains that they protect. With immortal patience bound to their master's command, the stoic sentinels hold their post through wind, storm, and flood.

Fear is the scarecrow's singular purpose, and fear is its grimmest weapon. Fear binds it together and draws it like a hunger. Gaze too long into those formless canvas faces and you will see fear and death smoldering like corpse candles in the scarecrow's dark, sackcloth eyes.

When the hags of the Feywild constructed the first animated scarecrows, this fear is what they yearned to unleash upon the frail mortal heart and fragile mortal mind. The hags pursued their malicious obsession with fervor and offered blood sacrifices to Vecna in exchange for arcane knowledge. One chill midnight, in the harvest time of the ancient world, they witnessed an uncanny phenomenon rife with wicked potential.

ORIGINS: HARVEST KINGS AND THE DANSE MACABRE

Sometimes during the harvest, in the long ago days when the Shadowfell lay close to the world, the spirits of the dead drifted the autumn skies like plumes of wood smoke; from musty tombs and earthen graves, corpses and shades clawed their way into the moonlight to walk the surface of the world again in a macabre jamboree.

To appease and honor the restless dead, fearful mortals followed an ancient tradition—carving ghastly deaths-head jack o' lanterns and placing them atop the shoulders of the ordinary scarecrows in their fields as a sign to the dead, meaning "Pass over this place, ye cold and restless ones, for when Death is nigh, we do his subjects honor."

But once in a great while, when the moon was a wintry silver scythe poised above the autumn world, a wandering spirit happening upon a lonely scarecrow slumping from a fencepost would inhabit the straw frame. The scarecrow's jack o' lantern head would blaze to life with an eerie flickering fire, and the scarecrow would leap from its post and dance amid the husks of the harvest, which bowed before it like supplicants before a kind of harvest king.

Guided by some mysterious purpose, this ghastly, jubilant entity would lead the procession of the dead in the Danse Macabre night after night. The Danse Macabre cavorted from grave to grave and around the countryside to frighten mortals wherever they dwelt, reminding them that even amid the bounty of their harvest and the cheer of their autumn hearth, death looms near.

The Mother of Scarecrows

A proud and ancient hag created the first scarecrows. She came to the world from the brambles and briars of the Feywild, and raw magic glittered in her blood. Some say she was called Baba Yaga, some say Morgan, and others Iggwilv, though time has forgotten the truth of it.

This hag watched delighted as panicked mortals cowered before the harvest kings' grim entourage. She resolved to learn the trick of their making, but more so of making them obedient, that she might terrorize the mortal world with her own deathly heralds.

In a brown autumn field beneath a horned demon moon, the hag called out to the powers of darkness and bade them attend her. The hag would have offered the darkness a piece of her black soul for the knowledge she sought, but she had sold the last withered bit of it to a devil long ago. Instead, she offered the lives of the mortals who owned the field. After the hag had murdered them and sucked the last of the marrow from their bones, a voice from the darkness whispered to her the secret of stitching spirits into bodies of cloth and straw.

PHYSIOLOGY

Most scarecrows are created as guardians (*Monster Manual 3*, page 169) to frighten intruders away from their master's domain. A scarecrow's physical form is intentionally macabre to aid this effect. Stuffing falls loose in some places and bulges asymmetrically in others, hobbling the misbegotten effigies with a shambling, inhuman gait. Black feathers and tiny hints of bone protrude from tangles of straw—the remnants of field mice and ravens that ventured too close. At a distance, their frowning sackcloth faces, scarred with coarse stitches that glower down through uneven eye holes and a coarse, howling gash in the fabric where its mouth ought to be, evoke the agonized semblance of a corpse that has lost its features to the elements. When this skewed humanoid imitation stirs from its long, stationary watch and lurches suddenly to life before the eyes of surprised trespassers, only the steel-hearted can behold the utter wrongness of its being without fleeing in horror.

A scarecrow is not just a physical construct made of cloth and straw and thread. Within it is bound the spirit of a thing that once lived. It is this uncanny presence from beyond death that inspires fear in living things.

A scarecrow is neither living nor undead. Its maker snags a spirit from the ether and binds it to the construct's material form. Though this spirit animates the scarecrow, the physical components used to create the scarecrow's body significantly influence its behavior. The following elements typically make up a scarecrow's construction.

Cloth

When hags first created scarecrows, they sought to entrap the spirits of victims they had murdered and eaten by covering a straw effigy in sackcloth, dressing it in the victim's clothing, and channeling the spirit inside. The hags knew that after the span of a day, at the next moonrise the lingering spirit's connection to the world would fade and it would drift away to the Shadowfell.

The victim's clothing serves as a powerful attractor for its spirit, which is still drawn to the physical exterior it wore in life. The hags learned to trick the spirit into believing the straw effigy wearing its clothes was its still-living body. As soon as the spirit inhabited the effigy, the hags used nightmare thread to stitch the sackcloth closed around the straw, thereby binding the spirit within the scarecrow.

Although scarecrows are no longer exclusively constructed by hags from the spirits of their own murdered victims, cloth remains an important determinant for the kind of spirit that will be drawn into a scarecrow. Cloth carries familiar physical and psychic impressions reminiscent of sensations a spirit might have experienced in its lifetime. A scarecrow creator that seeks to make a fiercely independent creation might try to attract a noble's spirit by decking the effigy in cloth of brocade velvet. A creator seeking a competent sergeant might dress the effigy in the tabard of an officer. Most scarecrows, however, are bound up with sackcloth and dressed in the clothes of peasants, serfs, commoners, and humble folk who know their place at the bottom of the great chain of being—scarecrows that obediently recognize their creator as lord and master.

Head

No matter the makeup of its body, a scarecrow's head is its most frightening aspect. To gaze upon its eyes is to glimpse the otherworldly entity lurking beneath the cloth and within the stuffing. Madhouses hold dozens of wretches who looked too long upon the thing's terrifying visage and lost their minds to the all-consuming dread inspire by that horrific countenance.

Mortal fear is what gives purpose to a scarecrow. Each scarecrow variant possesses a head suited for a different degree of terror. Most have cloth heads with features stitched or painted on to resemble demented masks.

When a demon possesses a scarecrow, its features contort in impossible exaggerations; its eyes light with fiery abyssal radiance and stitches at the mouth rip asunder to form a ragged tear that evokes the soul-hungering fangs of its native demon maw.

Harvest king scarecrows wear death's-head jack o' lanterns placed upon their shoulders by druids, farmers, witches, and others observing ancient traditions of the harvest.

Scarecrow horrors wear the faces of the poor souls whose innards comprise their stuffing. The flesh of the victim's face—sometimes its entire rotting head—is stitched onto the horror's shoulders or attached with metal hooks.

The construction of the scarecrow's head is of utmost importance to its creator, who can maintain a watch over its domain regardless of distance by spying on trespassers through its creation's eyes,.

Mounting

Fence posts, poles, and wooden frames are only a few objects that can serve as scaffolds from which to hang a scarecrow.

A scarecrow's support stands at the center of its "haunting grounds," the scarecrow's lair and the territory it guards and patrols. It must not stray from that area for as long as it is bound to its creator.

Nearly all scarecrow mounts are vertical. As the lightning rod draws electricity from the sky, so too does a scarecrow's mount channel spirits from where they wander above and below ground. The Create Scarecrow ritual pulls the spirit toward either end of the mount, channels it into the effigy, and infuses the scarecrow with the animating entity.

When creating a scarecrow, selecting the right location for the mount is crucial for two reasons.

First, the ritual binds the scarecrow to its mount and haunting grounds; unless its creator perishes or releases the scarecrow, it remains forever within its haunting grounds and returns to its mount.

Second, spirits passing between the world and the Shadowfell are attracted to transition points between the realms of the living and the dead. If the scarecrow's mount stands near a shadow crossing or upon a site where significant death occurred, spirits are more likely to congregate there in their passage between the two worlds. Performing the Create Scarecrow ritual in broad daylight in an open field or a civilized area, on the other hand, rarely yields results, because the sought-after spirits seldom frequent such places.

Stuffing

A scarecrow's stuffing is where its animating spirit is bound, so it is a key component in the scarecrow's construction. The stuffing must be specially conditioned in accordance with the ritual. For example, common straw cannot animate a straw scarecrow; according to folklore, the straw must be stolen from a farmer's field on the night of a harvest moon or it will fail to contain the animating spirit.

Special conditioning does not necessitate *quality*. Some specially conditioned stuffing is pure, clean, and strong. Other stuffing is rotted or filled with sticks and bones. Some stuffing crawls with worms and mites.

In theory, a scarecrow can be composed of any kind of conditioned stuffing, from balled up magic scrolls to bags of fine sand to clusters of knotted rags. Vicious creatures such as fomorians and oni create scarecrow horrors by animating cloth dummies stuffed with the innards of a creature that has trespassed upon their territory. Each of these types of stuffing can have a different effect upon not only the way the scarecrow functions in combat but the way it behaves and interacts with other creatures.

The following examples of variant scarecrow stuffing are monster themes (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 104) that can be used in place of the "straw" powers possessed by the scarecrows in *Monster Manual 3*. They can also be used as a starting point to build, customize, or inspire your own unique scarecrow variants.

Arcane Stuffing: Some scarecrows are stuffed with papers holding glyphs and arcane writings set down by a spellcaster who was later turned to undeath. Extremely rare and expensive to produce, these fearsome scarecrows are protected by strong magical wards that radiate arcane power. Spirits that inhabit scarecrows of this kind typically manifest imperious, lofty, or sadistic personalities. In battle, they dare their enemies to touch them, and their cold confidence strikes fear into the hearts of their foes. They are often clothed in wizards' garb, and eldritch blue lightning crackles in the dark holes of their eyes and mouth. Sometimes these scarecrows walk about without their cloth exterior, appearing as a shambling humanoid shape made of fluttering paper.

Triggered Actions

Arcane Stuffing (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**

Trigger: A creature targets the scarecrow with an opportunity attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The scarecrow teleports up to 5 squares. If the triggering attack hit the scarecrow, the attacker also takes 10 fire and lightning damage.

Rag Stuffing: Rags used to soak up the blood of a murder and rags employed to bind the limbs of the insane are sometimes stuffed into limp, gangly scarecrows that experience more fear than they inspire. The rag-stuffed effigies hold frightened spirits that dodge quickly away from weapons while striving to eliminate their wielders. Rag scarecrows tend toward paranoid, impulsive, and psychotic behavior, and they are more likely than other scarecrows to fixate upon a random victim and stalk it with an unabated obsession.

Traits

Rag Stuffing

Whenever an enemy misses the scarecrow with a melee attack, that enemy takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the scarecrow until the end of the attacker's next turn.

Sand Stuffing: Sand-stuffed scarecrows are ominous, silent guardians made from bags containing sand that once filled an hourglass owned by a necromancer. If ever its body loses a significant amount of sand, the spirit within the scarecrow can leave its cloth shell to reform as an entity of floating sand and glowing eyes. Given time, the spirit can gather all its sand together and repair its broken body. In their ephemeral forms of swirling sand, they survive to flit back to their masters and report all that they have seen.

Triggered Actions

Sand Stuffing (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**

Trigger: The scarecrow is first bloodied.

Effect (Free Action): The scarecrow can choose to take damage equal to half its bloodied value. If it does so, the scarecrow gains phasing and insubstantial for the rest of the encounter.

Thread

Thread woven from the strands of a nightmare's mane is the traditional material used to stitch a scarecrow's cloth around its stuffing. Hags lace the strands of the nightmare's mane with the spidery filaments of dark dreams so that the resulting thread exudes a force of psychic terror strong enough to keep a scarecrow spirit bound within the cloth and stuffing, suppressing independent will and ensuring the scarecrow's subservience.

The weaving of nightmare thread is a process practiced only by the hags, because only night hags know the way to enter the minds of sleeping mortals and delve into the deep subconscious to pluck terrors from the dreamer's mind and shape those dark dreams into filaments of pure dread.

Scarecrows can be made without nightmare thread. However, these scarecrows tend toward "faulty" individualistic behavior, because the spirits within them quickly discover and then assert their own personalities. This is why scarecrows made by creatures other than hags are more benevolent and less terrifying.

Nightmare thread is a precious commodity that the hags seldom relinquish, except in evil bargains that promise to spread great wickedness.

Nightmare Thread **Level 15 Uncommon**

When burned, this thread, woven from a nightmare by the hand of a hag, makes you a terrifying vision in the eyes of your enemy.

Other Consumable 1,000 gp

Power (Consumable ✦ Fear): Standard Action. *Effect:* Burn this nightmare thread and designate one creature within 5 squares of you that you can see. That creature cannot willingly move into a square adjacent to you (save ends). Creatures immune to fear are immune to this effect.

Variable Components

The following variable components are also used to create certain types of scarecrows.

Heart: When a scarecrow slays a humanoid creature, its victim's heart retains the sensation of overwhelming terror it experienced at the instant of its death. New scarecrows implanted with the terrorized hearts of victims slain by a scarecrow are called "haunters" (*Monster Manual 3*, page 169), and they exude such fear that living things panic in their presence. A humanoid heart attracts strong spirits to a scarecrow more than cloth or stuffing does, so the hearts of humanoids slain by scarecrows are greatly desired by those who would create them. As a result, many scarecrows tear out their victims' still-beating hearts to deliver the gory prize to their master.

Implement: Sometimes instead of inhabiting the stuffing, a scarecrow's spirit is stored within an implement connected to its body, such as a tall hat, a pipe, or a weapon. The scarecrow channels its animating force from this object, and when its body is destroyed or separated from the object, the spirit returns to the implement and waits for a time when the object next comes into contact with a scarecrow, which it then animates. These objects are normal items, and destroying them is no more difficult than destroying any other normal item. If the implement is destroyed, the scarecrow's spirit is set free.

Wicker: Dark rumors abound of the hags' secret and most horrific scarecrows. These colossal atrocities are made from wicker and they stand a full titan's height. But they contain an entirely different kind of stuffing: dozens of entrapped living mortals caged within the wicker frame.

When the wicker is set ablaze, the scarecrow comes to life. As the screaming bodies burn, the wicker scarecrow animates, channeling the fear from those burning within it and the passing of their souls into energy that allows it to wreak a devastating path of destruction. Once all the lives within it have expired, the flames consume the wicker scarecrow until finally it burns to ashes.

CULTURE

Scarecrows differ from most constructs in that the forces that animate them are spiritual in nature—vestiges of souls capable of learning, imprinting new memories, and, if released from their creator, forming unique identities.

The Nature of the Spirit

With the exception of scarecrows such as the demon scarecrow and the scarecrow horror, the animating forces bound to scarecrows are spiritual entities. They are not undead driven by an animus (*Open Grave*, page 7) or undead with souls bound to a past life as with ghosts, nor are they living constructs, but they are something in between. Sages continue to speculate whether the spirits that animate scarecrows are *actual* souls or a vestige or reflection of a soul. Only the hags know for certain, and they will never tell.

The spirit that inhabits a scarecrow determines its character and its inner nature—a moral compass of which a newly created scarecrow might not even be aware. Mortals typically shun scarecrows because of the fearsome appearance scarecrows have and their association with hags and the dead. Few realize that, released from their roles as abominable fear-inducing guardians, individual scarecrows have the potential to be as different from one another as mortals. This is due entirely to the unique spirit that animates each scarecrow.

A scarecrow's spirit does not recall the memories it had as a living creature. Nevertheless, the spirit gradually adopts a personality that reflects its true nature. If its creator abandons it or neglects to curb its natural personality, in time the scarecrow's outward behavior

comes to reflect the truth of its inner self and the mystery of what it might have been before.

Some scarecrows are inhabited by the spirits of mystics, and grow wise and insightful. Some are haughty nobles that sit imperiously upon their mounts, surveying their territory as if from a throne. Some are murderers' spirits, full of hate and vengeance. Upon its creation, each scarecrow begins "blank," but the patterns of its true nature eventually begin to manifest unless checked by the scarecrow's creator.

Exploration and Synthesis

Although the sackcloth head of an ordinary scarecrow lacks a proper brain, once a spirit is bound within the straw of a scarecrow, it can store memories, learn skills, and communicate in any language it is taught. Many creators perceive a threat in such learning, however, and prefer to keep their scarecrows isolated and ignorant.

Scarecrows spend most of their time as sentries, observing the same ground for days, weeks, and years on end. With so much time spent in idleness, scarecrows enter an inert state, effectively shutting down until something enters their haunting grounds. While in this state, without trespassers to terrify, it is said the spirit of the scarecrow dreams and grimly contemplates its existence.

The longer a scarecrow exists, the clearer its awareness of the world beyond its haunting grounds. Although memories of a previous life do not return to it, familiar sensations that might once have stirred its soul—a sublime moonrise, an animal's suffering, an act of kindness—do return, and by synthesizing these sensations, the scarecrow begins to awaken to whom and what it truly is or was. If their creators perish or abandon them, sometimes these scarecrows gradually lose the lust for fear instilled in them by their creators and begin to adjust to life in the world as free independent constructs.

Although it is uncommon for a scarecrow to gain this kind of independence, one that has been abandoned for more than a century sometimes breaks from its inert state, and curiosity draws it beyond its haunting grounds. It wonders what it is and what became of its creator. These scarecrows might wander to the ends of the world seeking answers from sages and oracles who can give them clues about past lives, in hopes of fulfilling a long forgotten desire, promise, or destiny.

Scarecrow Allies

In the Feywild, most scarecrows serve as guardians to hags, fomorians, eladrin, gnomes, and other fey. In the world and in the Shadowfell, when they are not serving arcane spellcasters, scarecrows keep company with the undead, drawn by a common connection to the hazy place between life and death where the spirit and the animus share common ground.

Scarecrows that gain self-awareness and independence, however, seek their way in the world much like a living construct might do. These scarecrows ally themselves with humanoids and adventurers that can help them in their search for discovery and identity.

CREATING A SCARECROW

The following ritual allows the caster to create a scarecrow to guard a specific, predetermined area. Creating a scarecrow is a costly process for any but the hags, who guard this ritual jealously and charge dearly for its secret and its specially prepared components. The component cost and market price indicated below are approximately five times higher than normal for a ritual of this level, to represent the difficulty of acquiring or casting it without active help from a hag. Given the dark nature of this ritual, it is entirely reasonable for you to decide that its components cannot be purchased in any legitimate market or civilized area. In that case, characters would need to undertake specific quests to gather the components, or find a hag and compel her to sell them (which would be an adventure in itself).

CREATE SCARECROW

You create a scarecrow by binding a spirit into a physical effigy.

Level: 14
Category: Creation
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Permanent
Component Cost: 5,000 gp
Market Price: 22,500 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You lure a spirit into an effigy of your construction, creating a scarecrow that guards a permanent designated area of 12 squares by 12 squares against trespassers. The scarecrow also grants its creator brief visions through its eyes until the scarecrow is destroyed or until its creator dismisses it. This protected area surrounds the scarecrow's mount and is established as the scarecrow's "haunting grounds."

Before you cast this ritual, you gather the specific components for the type of scarecrow you wish to create and place them upon a scarecrow mount. This mount can be a high pole or stake, a tree, a fencepost, a wooden frame, or a similar structure from which the scarecrow can survey the area it guards. This mount is the scarecrow's permanent post. It can leave its mount at will and it can patrol its haunting grounds, but it cannot willingly venture beyond them unless a combat encounter causes it to cross the perimeter (but see below). At the end of such an encounter, the scarecrow returns to its haunting grounds.

If the scarecrow's creator commands it beyond its haunting grounds, moves its mount, or releases it from service, the scarecrow gains its freedom and is no longer bound to its mount or its haunting grounds. It has complete free will and can do as it wishes. Some creators never bind their scarecrows to haunting grounds. Instead, they offer their free-willed creations friendship and the choice to ally with their creators as companion characters (***Dungeon Master's Guide 2***, page 27). Free-willed scarecrows created by good creatures often choose to serve their creators this way.

To complete the Create Scarecrow ritual, make a DC 25 Arcana check.

Success: You successfully create the scarecrow of your choice of the ritual caster's level or lower. Demon scarecrows can be created with this ritual only after completing a successful performance of the summon demon ritual (***Demonomicon***, page 18).

Failure: No spirit is compelled to inhabit the effigy. Instead, minor spirit vestiges settle on the materials, allowing you to create 6 scarecrow shamblers (***Monster Manual 3***, page 168) to patrol the same haunting grounds.

No matter how many creatures assist in the ritual, the creature that makes the Arcana check is considered the scarecrow's creator.

A scarecrow created with this ritual gains the following encounter power.

Triggered Actions
Master's Sight ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The scarecrow hits an enemy with a melee attack.
Effect (Free Action): The scarecrow's creator can see through the scarecrow's eyes until the start of the scarecrow's next turn.

SCARECROW VARIANTS

Hanging forlornly—or some might think menacingly—in a field, a scarecrow can frighten away more than just crows. With its sackcloth face and straw-stuffed body, the guardian watches over its domain with a stillness that some might mistake for inanimate . . . until it moves suddenly to defend its assigned territory.

DEMON SCARECROW

In the Abyss, they were nothings—dretches, manes, and rutterkin that fought and died a thousand times over in the endless tide of abyssal slaughter. But upon the world, little competition exists for the cruelty, malice, and raw destructive rage of a demon inhabiting a physical form.

In a body made of straw, the demon scarecrow trudges through the tall crops in search of souls to sever from living bodies. The more lives they claim, the mightier they become. Once the scarecrow demon has claimed enough souls, it returns to the Abyss as a far more powerful demon than it was when it first inhabited the scarecrow body.

Ruthless Predators: Demon scarecrows destroy everything in their path, but they especially delight in hunting down creatures that flee from them. The demon feeds on fear, and it savages creatures with the strongest cause to fear it, especially bloodied or

Demon Scarecrow **Level 14 Brute**
Medium elemental animate (construct, demon) XP 1,000
HP 170; **Bloodied** 85 **Initiative** +12
AC 26, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +12
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison, sleep

Standard Actions
Scythe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage, or 1d8 + 42 damage if the scarecrow scores a critical hit.
Reaper's Stroke (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d12 + 15 damage, or 5d12 + 15 damage against bloodied targets.

Minor Actions
Soul-Freezing Gaze (fear) ✦ **At-Will (1/round)**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +17 vs. Will
Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions
Demon Straw ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The scarecrow is reduced to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): One ally within 5 squares of the scarecrow gains the *scythe* basic attack and the *demon straw* power. That ally must also be a scarecrow.
Soul Slayer ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Trigger: The scarecrow reduces an enemy to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The scarecrow can make a *scythe* attack.
Variable Resistance ✦ 2/Encounter
Trigger: The scarecrow takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage.
Effect (Free Action): The scarecrow gains resist 15 to the triggering damage type until the end of the encounter or until it uses *variable resistance* again.

Skills Athletics +18
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 19 (+11) **Cha** 10 (+7)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment scythe

helpless creatures. Because the demon slaughters living beings to increase its standing in the Abyss, it makes a coup de grace against a fallen foe whenever possible, despite danger to itself. The demon knows it is difficult to destroy, and it expresses little concern for its own safety.

Bound to a Murder Weapon: As soon as a demon is bound into a scarecrow, it seeks a killing implement—scythes, bludgeons, knives, blunt rods of iron—anything that inflicts a brutal, messy death. When the demon scarecrow's body is destroyed, the demon withdraws into its weapon. The weapon flies into the grasp of a nearby scarecrow, which the demon then possesses. If no animated scarecrows are present, it attempts to inhabit an inanimate scarecrow, which animates as a scarecrow shambler. If no other scarecrows are present, the demon cannot transfer its power and it becomes trapped in the world, formless and powerless until it discovers a way back to the Abyss.

DESTROYING THE DEMON SCARECROW

This is an optional story rule for destroying a demon scarecrow for an adventure that features it as a major adversary.

When a demon scarecrow is destroyed, the demon flees to find another host—it might even seek a host beyond the reach of its *demon straw* power at the DM's discretion. If it finds another host before the next rise of the moon, then it recovers all its power and returns to continue its reaping of souls. However, a little-known ritual can bar the demon from inhabiting another vessel ...

If the last scarecrow the demon inhabits is destroyed and its stuffing made into a nest that is inhabited by a crow before the next moonrise, the demon is barred from inhabiting another form and becomes trapped in the world, formless and powerless until it discovers a way back to the Abyss.

Harvest King Scarecrow

As old as the seasons, harvest kings herald the presence of death, leading a procession of the dead through the world in the middle of the harvest's bounty. These scarecrows with macabre jack o' lantern heads have enthralled and terrified mortals since the earliest of days.

Teetering skeletons and shambling zombies, wraiths, ghouls, specters, and all the ranks of the dead join in the harvest king's parade. Wise mortals display jack o' lanterns or trade places with the dead by hiding underground in accordance with tradition. The procession stops in places where the living fail to show respect; sometimes the harvest king's entourage seizes such mortals and drags them back to the Shadowfell, and these unlucky individuals are never seen or heard from again.

Entities of a Season: The withered remnants of summer, the bent crops and husks, and the pumpkin vines—some say even the patterns of clouds and the chill night winds—are under the harvest king's command, and it calls upon them at its whim with a voice that has the timbre of the earth. But when the harvest season passes and the dead return to the grave,

Harvest King Scarecrow **Level 8 Controller (Leader)**
Medium shadow animate (construct) XP 350

HP 87; **Bloodied** 43 **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 19 **Perception** +8
Speed 6 (forest walk) Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison, sleep; **Resist** 5 fire
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects

Traits

☼ **The Danse Macabre ✦ Aura 5**
Any undead or scarecrow ally that starts its turn within the aura gains +1 speed until the start of its next turn. Each living enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claws ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

✲ **Harvest's Grasp** (zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: The scarecrow slides the target 2 squares and the target is restrained (save ends).

✧ **Hurl the Head of Fire** (fire) **✦ Encounter**
Requirement: The scarecrow must be bloodied.
Attack: Area burst 3 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 damage + 3d6 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
Aftereffect: The scarecrow takes 10 damage.
Special: After the scarecrow uses this power, it can no longer use *jack o' lantern gaze*.

Minor Actions

✧ **Jack o' Lantern Gaze** (fear) **✦ At-Will 1/round**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The target grants combat advantage until the start of the scarecrow's next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +14, Nature +13

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 21 (+9)	**Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 15 (+6)	**Int** 16 (+7)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment old pipe

then at last the spirits that inhabit the harvest kings leave their scarecrow bodies and pass back into the Shadowfell.

For more on harvest king scarecrows, see "Origins: Harvest Kings and the Danse Macabre," above.

Scarecrow Horror

In folk tales, humanoids that made enemies of powerful evil beings such as demons, fomorians, hags, and oni were warned by these creatures that they would have their bones ground down and their entrails stuffed into scarecrows. Only too late do some poor fools discover that this fate is not just a storybook threat.

The scarecrow horror stinks with the cloying reek of decay from the desiccated intestine crammed into its rough sackcloth exterior. Its nightmarish face was peeled from a humanoid victim and attached to the scarecrow with metal hooks. Buttons are sewn to the flesh where its eyes should be. Those who behold its warped flesh mask seldom sleep without seeing the horror staring back in their dreams.

Ravenous for the Living: Scarecrow horrors pursue their victims with a hateful enmity. They are not bound with spirits, but instead they have an undead animus that desires only the destruction of the living. When it senses a living creature, the scarecrow horror spasms. Its mouth—sewn shut to prevent it from ripping itself apart in hunger—moves up and down, moaning its muffled excitement.

Born of Horrific Origin: A terrible oni witch that lived in a cave of mirrors once caught seven thieves looting her belongings. To teach them a lesson, this oni disemboweled one of them and stuffed a sackcloth effigy with its entrails; she hooked the thief's face onto the effigy's shoulders and animated the thing with dark magic. When the oni turned her creation on its former companions, they fled in terror throughout her cave. But confounded by the mirrors she had set up, they became lost.

In the end, seven gruesome scarecrows writhed beside the cave entrance, pinned to the stone with iron spikes, their dead human faces possessing black buttons where their eyes once had been.

Scarecrow Horror	**Level 10 Soldier**
Medium shadow animate (construct, undead)	XP 500
HP 108; **Bloodied** 54	**Initiative** +12
AC 26, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22	**Perception** +6
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison, sleep **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Traits	
☼ **Aura of Decay** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⨁ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage.	
⨁ **Claim the Doomed** (fear, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one dazed creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage plus 3d8 psychic damage, and the scarecrow marks the target (save ends).	
Minor Actions	
⨁ **Horrific Countenance** (fear) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)	
Attack: Close burst 5 (one creature in the burst); +13 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dazed until the start of the scarecrow's next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
⨁ **Putrid Stuffing** (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The scarecrow is first bloodied.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d8 + 9 necrotic and poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Skills Athletics +15	
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 21 (+10)	**Wis** 12 (+6)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 10 (+5)	**Cha** 5 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	

About the Author

Steve Townshend's recent design credits include *Monster Manual 3*, *Demonomicon*, *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*, and *The Madness of Gardmore Abbey*. Oublivae and the banderhobbs number amongst his wicked children. Steve completed the heroic tier as an actor and improvisor, but took the fiction writer paragon path. He lives with an elf princess and their familiar in Chicago, a Big City on a Lake.

Exploring Gauntlgrym

By Bruce R. Cordell ✦ illustration by William O'Connor

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Silver halls and mithral doors,
Stone walls to seal the cavern,
Grander sights than e'er before,
In smithy, mine, and tavern.
–Ancient dwarven verse

Gauntlgrym is an ancient dwarven city, long lost and sealed away. Rumors suggest it is located somewhere under the Crags south of Mirabar in the Sword Coast North.

Expeditions seeking this jewel of the Delzoun dwarves have clambered all over the Crags, following hints from tattered maps and half-remembered legends. Stories of the magnificent treasures cached in Gauntlgrym are told and retold up and down the Sword Coast, luring new generations of shining-eyed adventurers to try their luck. All efforts to reclaim the place have failed. If any ever did find the Delzoun city, word of their success has never reached the wider world.

Until now.

According to a new account, a group of prospecting dwarves based in Neverwinter recently found the fabled city. To memorialize their fantastic discovery, the dwarves prepared a haunting treatise that touched on the city's appearance and also told of a secret cult of firestarters, murderous avian humanoids, dwarf ghosts, and a buried primordial.

Immediately thereafter, the aforementioned cult, which had members who called themselves Ashmadai, set upon the prospectors and murdered them. Then the Ashmadai laid a curse on all those

who heard of the prospector's discovery, even as they attempted to find and burn every account of the story. The Ashmadai nearly succeeded, but at least one copy of the treatise remains.

If you are reading this, beware their curse.

Brief Tour of Gauntlgrym

The approach to Gauntlgrym lies within an enormous subterranean vault illuminated by phosphorescent lichen and residual enchantments. Scarred stone and a litter of white bones cover the cavern floor. The bones are relics of a long-ago massacre which included goblins and perhaps orcs, suggesting that the Delzoun fought an invading force of humanoids.

A body of dark, still water drowns the cavern's center. A cluster of enormous stalagmites reaches up from the lake's surface. Similarly gargantuan stalactites droop down from the vault ceiling. The stalagmites and stalactites are tunneled, windowed, and ringed by constructed stairwells and balconies carved in sturdy dwarven fashion. The crenellated balconies that ring the area once served as guard posts but now are empty but for a scattering of rusted ballistae.

Beyond the guardian stalactites rears a vast wall which seals off the far end of the vault. The wall is built of cunningly-laid stone blocks mortared with enchantments to protect the city from being found or breached.

Broad towers flank a set of massive mithral doors set into the center of the wall. The doors open easily only for those who are "Delzoun true born." Beyond lies a narrow tunnel lined with murder holes, ancient wards, and mechanical springs. This trapped tunnel opens onto decorated halls, grand throne and temple chambers, dwarf-carved avenues, and ever-deeper levels of Gauntlgrym. Delzoun ghosts wander these dark lanes and tunnels forever, lost in dreams of the city's former glory. They are quick to rouse if any visitor seeks to despoil their massive tomb.

Beneath the city are endless mines and the legendary furnaces of Gauntlgrym, whose fires burn hot enough to bake even a dragon. The furnaces lie at the bottom of an open chamber of crisscrossing bridges and rail lines suspended over an abyss that plunges down to orange and red lava. This vast chamber is home to murderous flocks of dire corbies who became trapped when the city was sealed off long ago.

The furnaces draw their fire from the entity trapped beneath them: a dawn titan, which is a primordial of inferno-hot fire.

Delzoun Dwarves

The subterranean dwarf realm of Delzoun was established west of and partly beneath the nation now known as Luruar. In that long ago time, the Delzoun dwarves traded with the first empire of Netheril, Illefarn, and other contemporary kingdoms. The realm of Delzoun encompassed several cities and fortresses that were both above and below ground, including the port city of Ascore, Citadel Adbar, Tzindylspar, and Citadel Sundbarr.

Delzoun waxed bright, and it shines in the hearts and minds of many dwarves to this day. But the ancient dwarf realm, for all its strength and mastery, gained equally powerful and terrible foes, including phaerimm. The Delzoun dwarves, caught up in the same blight that brought the empire of Netheril low, fled their citadels and cities to found a new, hidden stronghold which they called Gauntlgrym.

This secret citadel of dwarves hidden somewhere beneath the earth was near bursting with all the treasures of greater Delzoun which had been carried there by dwarf survivors fleeing to the one place that seemed to offer sanctuary. For two centuries, Gauntlgrym prospered, hidden from all its enemies by powerful veils of enchantment.

Then a traitor betrayed the location of Gauntlgrym to its enemies. Only a renegade of Delzoun blood could have laid bare the defenses designed to fence out all enemies, including orcs. As it was, a great orc horde streamed south from the Spine of the World and Ice Mountains and devastated Gauntlgrym in a series of rabid assaults. The last, great hope of Delzoun fell.

A few fortresses survived that onslaught, including Citadel Adbar and Sundbarr, but the dwarf kingdom was dead.

Delzoun Dwarves Today

The confederacy of Luruar claims a large portion of the lands once controlled by lost Delzoun. Thousands of years have passed since Delzoun was founded and fell, and in that time the bloodlines of the dwarves of the region have been mixed with the other clans of Faerûn. Few dwarves now possess Delzoun blood thick enough for them to rightfully claim they are directly descended from that ancient kingdom, though many make that boast anyway. All who do, delight in telling and retelling stories of the ancient realm, especially of Gauntlgrym, whose whispered treasuries haunt the dreams of many a dwarf crafter, trader, adventurer, and lord.

Delzoun Dwarf Adventurers

Dwarves who claim to be of Delzoun blood hail from somewhere in or around Luruar, that cosmopolitan confederacy of humans, elves, half-elves, dwarves, halflings, and eladrin. No dwarf worth his or her salt who claims Delzoun blood doesn't keep an ear to the ground when it comes to news of Gauntlgrym. If ever a rumor worth more than a copper in a Sundabar tavern reaches a Delzoun dwarf's ear, that dwarf is likely out of his or her seat and gathering companions, hopeful that this will be the one! Even if the expedition leads only to shattered roads, crumbling outposts, and unnamed subterranean manors, it still provides an exciting adventure, and perhaps one more clue regarding Gauntlgrym's true location.

FEAT: DELZOUN TRUE BORN

Prerequisite: Dwarf

Benefit: Whenever you use *stand your ground* to make a saving throw to avoid falling prone, you can make the saving throw twice and use the more beneficial of the two results.

Special: You are considered to be a member of the lost kingdom of Delzoun for the purposes of all magic effects, items, and treaties that depend upon that distinction.

Ashmadai of Gauntlgrym

Ashmadai are a group of cultists who revere Asmodeus, an evil greater god who resides in the Nine Hells. Many Ashmadai are tieflings, but they can be of any race. Casual scrutiny isn't sufficient to reveal whether someone is a member of the secret cult. All are branded somewhere with a sign of Asmodeus's triple-triangle black symbol, but always in a place that clothing can easily cover. When an Ashmadai wants its affiliation with Asmodeus to be known, it wears a red sash bearing the Master of the Nine Hell's symbol.

Ashmadai originate in Thay. They are nominal allies of Szass Tam, thanks to a devilish relic the lich holds hostage and which the Ashmadai revere. In the past, the Ashmadai acted as Szass Tam's agents and footsoldiers because of this alliance. The Ashmadai have their own aims and ambitions, however. Even within the larger cult, secret cliques and sects have developed.

A sizable group of Ashmadai resides in the partially reconstructed city of Neverwinter. They blend in with the rest of the population and keep their allegiance to Asmodeus a secret. Thanks to Neverwinter's half-ruined, half-rebuilt condition, it is more of a frontier town than a city. It offers a bonanza of opportunities in salvage potential, adventure, and undiscovered vaults and temples where secret cults can meet and hold ceremonies without being noticed.

One cell of Ashmadai living in Neverwinter has dealings with a duergar named Nimor. The sect desires to locate a pure vein of a special red metal from which to forge their spear staves. This exotic iron, sometimes referred to as "hellthorn," may be the remnants of a primeval meteorite. It takes devilish enchantment particularly easily to craft *hellthorn weapons*. The duergar know where it can be prized from the Underdark.

Another group of Ashmadai monitors the approaches to Gauntlgrym at Szass Tam's command. The lich desires that the site remains sacrosanct while he determines how best to tap the power that runs ceaselessly through the old dwarven fortress. Though the Ashmadai obey Szass Tam in this directive to guard Gauntlgrym against intruders, it is also entirely likely the Ashmadai cult leaders seek to accomplish the same goal as the lord of Thay and claim the ancient source of power deep below the Delzoun ruin for themselves and their hellish master.

Hellthorn Weapon **Level 10+ Uncommon**

The weapon is forged of red iron, and it appears to radiate a palpable aura of devilish glee.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Weapon: Flail, heavy blade, spear, staff

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 fire damage per plus, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends)

Level 25 or 30: Ongoing 20 fire damage (save ends).

Property: You are considered to be a devil for the purposes of all effects that affect devils when it is beneficial for you. If you have resist fire through some other source, your resistance improves by 5.

Power (Encounter ✦ Fire): Free Action. *Trigger:* You miss with an attack that targets AC. *Effect:* An allied devil adjacent to the target you missed can make a basic attack against the target. If the allied devil hits, it deals extra fire damage equal to twice the enhancement bonus of this *hellthorn weapon*.

The Primordial Beneath Gauntlgrym

War once shook the vaults of creation, when the Dawn Titans (the primordials) fought the Estelar (the gods). The conflict raged so savagely that to save the world, it was twinned by a still greater power.

The gods gained dominion over the orb of Toril, host to the continent of Faerûn, while the primordials took sovereignty over the world of Abeir. In that one fell stroke, the Dawn Titans became a name that lived only in myth.

A few primordials escaped the partitioning, however, and slipped into Toril unnoticed. One of these, a primordial of magma and stone called Maegera the Inferno, was weary of the fight and uninterested in renewing hostilities, especially with nearly all its fellow Dawn Titans "exiled" to Abeir. Maegera seeped down beneath the earth to sleep away the ages.

Civilizations rose and fell on the surface while layers of sediment formed over Maegera's den. Millennia later, the dwarves of Delzoun discovered the sleeping primordial. Desperate to build a fortress capable of withstanding their foes, the Delzoun sited their city directly above the dozing Dawn Titan. In a fit of daring that amazes those few who learn of it, the dwarves engineered a primordial power tap and siphoned the energy of the sleeping Dawn Titan to power and protect the citadel city of Gauntlgrym.

It's no wonder the forge furnaces had a reputation for being so hot that they'd "bake a dragon." Maegera the Inferno's heat directly fires them.

Dire Corbies of Gauntlgrym

Dire corbies descend from a murder of predatory birds that were lost and trapped in the Underdark. Through mutation, each new generation grew more deadly and dangerous than the one before it. They lost the power of flight, but their wings developed into muscular, taloned limbs perfect for climbing cavern walls, pulling themselves through narrow tunnels, and eviscerating anything remotely edible. With their coal-black feathers, they blend readily into the subterranean darkness where they hunt.

A particularly vicious tribe of dire corbies infests a massive vault beneath Gauntlgrym. Though they are unintended guardians, their mere presence is an effective guard against those who would meddle with the Delzoun forge furnaces.

Lore

Dungeoneering DC 13: Though feral and primitive, dire corbies possess a rudimentary intelligence. Their call sounds something like the word "doom," though they probably aren't speaking Common.

Dungeoneering DC 17: Dire corbies are highly diverse in strength, depending on their age. Most don't survive past twenty years because of constant infighting within the flock. The young "wastrels" are tough and malicious, but they are far outclassed by the corbies who survive decades past adolescence.

Dungeoneering DC 22: Small hunting groups of dire corbies include three to five members. Larger flocks sometimes assemble; these include individuals of far greater power than the average corby. These "superflocks" occur when an entire tribe is mobilized.

Dire Corby Wastrel		**Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast, humanoid		XP 250
HP 72; **Bloodied** 36		**Initiative** +9
AC 20, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17		**Perception** +10
Speed 7		Darkvision
Traits		
Flock Attack		
A wastrel's melee attacks deal 5 extra damage against any enemy that grants combat advantage to it.		
Standard Actions		
⊕ **Beak** ✦ **At-Will**		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.		
⊕ **Double Peck** ✦ **At-Will**		
Effect: The wastrel uses *beak* twice. It can shift 2 squares before each attack.		
Move Actions		
Retributive Talon ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅		
Effect: The wastrel moves up to its speed. Any enemy that hits the wastrel with an opportunity attack during the move takes 10 damage.		
Minor Actions		
✧ **Doom Step** (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**		
Effect: The wastrel shifts up to its speed.		
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +9 vs. Will		
Hit: 1d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.		
Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +12		
Str 18 (+7)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 11 (+3)	**Cha** 8 (+2)
Alignment chaotic evil	**Languages** –	

Dire Corby Wastrels in Combat

Wastrels stay close to allies to gain combat advantage and thus gain the benefit of *flock attack*. In any given hunting flock of dire corbies, one or two begin combat using *doom step*, then the remainder of the group uses the same power later in the fight.

Dire Corby Shaman	Level 18 Artillery
Medium natural beast, humanoid	XP 2,000
HP 130; **Bloodied** 65	**Initiative** +10
AC 30, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 30	**Perception** +11
Speed 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Talon ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.

Spiritual Talon (psychic) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Will

Hit: 2d12 + 13 psychic damage.

Screech of Doom (psychic) **✦ At-Will**

Requirement: The shaman must be bloodied.

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Will

Hit: 2d12 + 8 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the shaman's next turn.

Ancestor Screech (psychic) **✦ Recharge** if the power misses

Requirement: An allied corby must be adjacent to the target.

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d12 + 9 psychic damage, and the target falls prone and is slowed (save ends).

Minor Actions

Scattering Shriek (fear, psychic) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied

Attack: Close blast 2 (enemies in the blast); +23 vs. Will

Hit: 1d12 + 5 psychic damage, and the shaman pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Skills Athletics +16, Stealth +15

Str 15 (+11)	**Dex** 13 (+10)	**Wis** 15 (+11)
Con 16 (+12)	**Int** 22 (+15)	**Cha** 8 (+8)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Dire Corby Shaman in Combat

A dire corby shaman uses *spiritual talon*, from a height if possible, to pick off enemies one by one. If foes draw too close, it uses *scattering shriek*, especially if it can push a foe from a high place.

Dire Corby Talon	Level 18 Minion Soldier
Medium natural beast, humanoid	XP 500
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +16
AC 34, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 26	**Perception** +14
Speed 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Talon Slash ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC

Hit: 13 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the talon's next turn.

Minor Actions

Wing Step ✦ At-Will (1/round)

Effect: The talon can move up to its speed, as long as it ends its move adjacent to another dire corby.

Triggered Actions

Opportunistic Talon ✦ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the talon takes damage from an allied dire corby.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The target takes 10 estra damage.

Str 22 (+15)	**Dex** 20 (+14)	**Wis** 14 (+11)
Con 16 (+12)	**Int** 11 (+9)	**Cha** 8 (+8)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Dire Corby Talons in Combat

A dire corby talon stays as close to both friends and foes as possible so it can use *opportunistic talon* to magnify the effect of its allies' attacks.

Dire Corby Champion	Level 17 Brute
Medium natural beast, humanoid	XP 1,600
HP 195; **Bloodied** 97	**Initiative** +14
AC 29, **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 27	**Perception** +17
Speed 8	Darkvision

Traits

Savage Talons ✦ Aura 1

Any enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 5 damage.

Standard Actions

Talon ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 3d12 + 8 damage.

Dire Talons ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⚅

Effect: The champion makes the following attack four times.

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 1d12 + 8 damage.

Minor Actions

Doom Spiral (fear, psychic) **✦ Encounter**

Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the blast); +19 vs. Will

Hit: 1d12 + 8 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Rend and Throw ✦ At-Will (1/turn)

Trigger: The champion hits one enemy with two or more *dire talons* attacks on its turn.

Effect (Free Action): The target takes 1d12 + 8 extra damage, and the champion slides the target up to 3 squares.

Skills Athletics +20, Stealth +19

Str 25 (+15)	**Dex** 23 (+14)	**Wis** 19 (+12)
Con 15 (+10)	**Int** 10 (+8)	**Cha** 8 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Dire Corby Champions in Combat

A dire corby champion uses *dire talons* as often as it can. It focuses all four attacks on a single enemy to increase its chance of triggering *rend and throw*.

Alpha Corby	**Level 20 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural beast, humanoid	XP 2,800
HP 190; **Bloodied** 95	**Initiative** +15
AC 34, **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 30	**Perception** +16
Speed 8	Darkvision
Traits	
☼ **Obsidian Feathers** ✦ **Aura** 2	
Enemies within the aura grant combat advantage to the alpha's dire corby allies.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Talon** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +25 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage.	
Ancestor Spirit (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +23 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d12 + 15 psychic damage, and the alpha corby pushes the target 5 squares.	
Shriek of Doom (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +22 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d12 + 8 psychic damage and the target is dazed (save ends).	
First Failed Saving Throw: The target falls unconscious (save ends).	
Miss: Half damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Doom of the Flock ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy misses the alpha corby with a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): One ally adjacent to the triggering enemy can make a melee basic attack against it as a free action.	
Skills Athletics +22, Stealth +20	
Str 25 (+17) **Dex** 21 (+15)	**Wis** 23 (+16)
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 15 (+12)	**Cha** 8 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –	

Alpha Corbies in Combat

The alpha corby enters combat only in the company of at least one dire corby shaman and numerous talons and champions. It uses its *obsidian feathers* and *doom of the flock* abilities to enhance its allies' attacks, and *shriek of doom* as often as possible to soften up the prey.

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the new *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*™, *Keep on the Shadowfell*™, *Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons*™, and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including *Plague of Spells,* first book in the new Abolethic Sovereignty series.

Eye on Dark Sun

Magma Elementals

by Rodney Thompson ✦ illustration by Emrah Elmasli

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The wastes of Athas have been known to produce strange abominations, a result of the warping of the fabric of creation by eons of abuse and neglect by the world's inhabitants. It should come as no surprise that a world so rich in elemental power would also produce twisted versions of elemental creatures. Creatures of earth and fire are among the most abundant elementals on Athas, and the union of these two elementals gives rise to one of the unique creatures to come out of the Athasian wastes: magma elementals.

Although rarely seen, magma elementals are thought to come into existence in places where great elemental power intersects with a warped or damaged landscape. They appear as shifting, amorphous masses of superheated rock and chunks of stone, a semiliquid creature that leaves a trail of charred earth in its wake. Because they arise from the fusion of earth elementals and fire elementals in the crucible of the Athasian wastes, magma elementals share similarities to both types while still remaining unique.

Lore

Arcana DC 13: Magma elementals are commonly found near volcanoes (such as the Smoking Crown) and other areas where both seismic and volcanic activity are common. Magma elementals are thought to begin their lives as two separate creatures, an earth elemental and a fire elemental, which become fused as a result of close proximity and the unstable nature of the Athasian wasteland.

Arcana DC 20: Though magma elementals begin their existence on Athas as a fusion of two existing elementals, there is evidence that magma elementals have transcended the boundaries separating Athas from the planes and some have carved out a home in the Elemental Chaos.

Religion DC 20: Some magma elementals are the subjects of worship by the elemental priests of Athas, who believe them to be manifestations of Athas's unique, elemental nature. Magma archons, in particular, frequently use the adulation of the natural inhabitants of Athas to their own ends. They see elemental priests as agents to be used and then discarded.

Encounters

Magma elementals are often found in the company of elemental creatures of earth and fire, including both elementals and archons. Some of the more powerful magma elementals have been spotted on volcanic islands in the Sea of Silt, particularly those near the Valley of Dust and Fire, and might be encountered alongside the giants that live on the more distant islands.

Lesser Magma Elemental **Level 2 Brute**
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, fire) XP 125

HP 46; **Bloodied** 23 **Initiative** +3
AC 14, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +0
Speed 6
Vulnerable 5 cold (see *obsidian crust*)

Traits

Obsidian Crust
When a magma elemental takes cold damage, it is also slowed until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Slam (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 fire damage.

Magma Trap (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 fire damage and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and is immobilized (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Magma Burst (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The magma elemental drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in burst); +3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 3 fire damage and the target is petrified and takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends both). This ongoing fire damage ignores the resistance provided by the petrified condition. The magma elemental is destroyed.

Str 17 (+16) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 15 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Magma Elemental **Level 12 Brute**
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, fire) XP 700

HP 150; **Bloodied** 75 **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 22 **Perception** +6
Speed 6
Vulnerable 5 cold (see *obsidian crust*)

Traits

Obsidian Crust
When a magma elemental takes cold damage, it is also slowed until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Slam (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 5 fire damage

Lava Smash (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 fire damage and the magma elemental pushes the target 3 squares. The target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends)

Triggered Actions

Magma Burst (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The magma elemental drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 6 fire damage and the target is petrified and takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends both). This ongoing fire damage ignores the resistance provided by the petrified condition. The magma elemental is destroyed.

Skills list any important skills and their modifiers
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+10) **Wis** 10 (+6)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+10)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Greater Magma Elemental **Level 22 Brute**
Large elemental magical beast (earth, fire) XP 4,150

HP 255; **Bloodied** 127 **Initiative** +18
AC 34, **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32 **Perception** +12
Speed 8
Vulnerable 5 cold (see *obsidian crust*)

Traits

Obsidian Crust
When a magma elemental takes cold damage, it is also slowed until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Slam (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +27 vs. AC
Hit: 6d10 + 5 fire damage

Eruption (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 1 (each creature in burst); +27 vs. AC
Hit: 6d10 + 5 fire damage

Triggered Actions

Magma Burst (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The magma elemental drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in burst); +23 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 5 fire damage and the target is petrified and takes ongoing 20 fire damage (save ends both). This ongoing fire damage ignores the resistance provided by the petrified condition. The magma elemental is destroyed.

Str 27 (+19) **Dex** 24 (+18) **Wis** 12 (+12)
Con 25 (+18) **Int** 12 (+12) **Cha** 25 (+18)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Magma Elemental in Combat

Magma elementals are unstable creatures as a result of their peculiar origin. When destroyed, they tend to burst outward, coating those creatures nearby in a layer of fast-hardening magma. Because of their brutish nature, they tend to put themselves as close as possible to as many enemies as possible. When they feel that their deaths are at hand, they may try to put themselves at the center of a group of foes in order to

ensure that they spill magma over as many enemies as possible.

Magma Archon

Magma archons are similar to the other elemental archons in many ways; they resemble soldiers and mercenaries more than untamed elementals, they appear to be humanoid in form, and they wear crafted metal armor. Magma archons are exceedingly rare, though; they are seen among the magma elementals of Athas only when large groups of magma elementals are gathered.

The existence of the magma archons makes little sense on first consideration; other archons were soldiers created long ago by powerful forces, and none of those forces remain today. Yet, magma archons do exist. So where did they come from?

Some scholars within the Veiled Alliance claim that magma archons resulted from the meddling of a sorcerer-king who tried to manipulate magma elementals in order to create new soldiers. Certain elemental priests believe that magma archons were once mere magma elementals that rose in power and intelligence and willingly adopted the form of an archon after seeing archons of other elements. Whatever the true reason for their existence, magma archons have far more intelligence and cunning than magma elementals, so they fall naturally into a leadership role.

Magma Archon **Level 13 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth, fire) XP 800

HP 129; **Bloodied** 64 **Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23 **Perception** +7
Speed 6
Immune disease, petrification, poison; **Vulnerable 10** cold

Traits

☼ **Melt the Ground** ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy takes 10 fire damage if it willingly leaves the aura.

Traits

Obsidian Crust
When a magma archon takes cold damage, it is also slowed until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Obsidian Longsword** (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage plus 5 fire damage
Effect: Until the end of the archon's next turn, if the target makes an attack that does not include the archon as a target, that attack provokes an opportunity attack from the archon.

⊘ **Focused Heat Ray** (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +16 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 5 fire damage

Command Elementals ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: One or two earth or fire creatures within 10 squares make basic attacks against different targets.

Triggered Actions

↯ **Explosive Surge** (fire, thunder) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Trigger: The magma archon takes fire damage.
Effect (Free Action): Each creature adjacent to the magma archon takes 10 fire and thunder damage.

Str 22 (+12)	**Dex** 18 (+10)	**Wis** 12 (+7)
Con 17 (+9)	**Int** 11 (+6)	**Cha** 19 (+10)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Primordial

Magma Archon in Combat

Magma archons, like magma elementals, prefer close combat in order to trap enemies in their auras. The raw heat given off by a magma archon turns the ground beneath them into a molten mess, which cools only enough to create a brittle crust. Other creatures risk breaking through that crust and becoming mired in magma. Magma archons always fight in concert with elemental allies (especially magma elementals) in order to get the most from their higher-damage attacks and to keep the enemy from escaping.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his Dungeons & Dragons® credits include *Monster Manual 3*, the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Fallen Lands*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, and *Monster Vault*.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Circle of Fangs Revisited

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by William O'Connor

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As described in a previous Eye column (see "The Circle of Fangs," *Dungeon* 181), three enchanted rings recently came to light that have identical effects. Among other powers, some not yet uncovered, they evoke rings of force daggers in midair. War Wizards of Cormyr have continued their investigations of the rings—and word has leaked out that two investigating mages have perished, slain by mysterious powers that were seemingly used from afar. (The mages are alive; the falsehood was leaked on purpose to help cover the tracks of the remaining two mages.) This rumor has fueled speculation in the city of Suzail (both private gossip and increasingly lurid accounts in local broadsheets) that the cabal of wizards known as the Fael Threl are tracing and watching over the "circles of fangs" from afar and working deadly magic through them to afflict persons who handle them.

The original team of five Wizards of War formed to track down the Fael Threl met with prompt disaster, with three of the five being murdered and warnings left to dissuade all others. Rather than stopping their investigations, this caused the two surviving mages to depart the realm, go into hiding, and pursue their assigned mission secretly. Word has now leaked out of the Royal Palace, by way of drink-loosened tongues at several recent court feasts, that these two survivors have learned more about the Fael Threl and sent at least one report back to the court.

A Mask Slips

Durvorkar (see *Dungeon* 181) assembled the little that is known about the Fael Threl—but now he's too dead to question. Those interested in this topic have determined that the name of the cabal was clearly Halruaan. It seems clear that the two investigating War Wizards, whose identities are being kept secret, went to Sembia and sought to ascertain Durvorkar's sources of information. As for information on these two mages, the surnames Paerdoavur, Allaghar, and Thalamond have slipped out or been mentioned in Suzailan street speculation. The obvious fact that three names are in circulation suggests that at least one is mistaken. It is not uncommon for Wizards of War to use false names or misdirect the public as to their identities, even in trivial matters.

Other fatalities include a smattering of mysterious deaths and disappearances in the Idlewind Lane area of Yhaunn, suggesting that the Fael Threl silenced some former acquaintances and trading partners of the unfortunate Durvorkar.

Recently the Cormyreans sent back to Suzail a slender, unpublished tome about the Fael Threl. Its contents were drawn from the notes of Eldrem Tathcaskur, a professional spy of Westgate, who compiled the dossier a decade ago. Tathcaskur used the professional name of "Watchfan," and he has not been seen or heard from in seven summers. Most think him dead, quietly slain by someone who became aware of his professional attentions. At least one priest of Oghma, Loremaster Breth Alkin of Selgaunt, believes (after several harrowing encounters endured by certain individuals in his city whose identities he is protecting) that Tathcaskur is now undead and he spies still, driven by a fierce hunger to avenge his own death and a gnawing need to complete his unfinished commissions. Tathcaskur might even be trying to reclaim his notebook, but it has already been thoroughly perused by veteran Wizards of War. From it, they have learned a little more about the Fael Threl—and about the rings.

The Fael Threl

Tathcaskur's notes contain more speculation than fact about the Fael Threl. He did, however, establish that the first mention of them was in a factor's (trade agent's) written warning to his employers, the wealthy and powerful Selemchant family of Athkatla in Amn. Tathcaskur attributed the Fael Threl with several then-recent and mysterious deaths of Cowled Wizards. The undated letter is known to have been penned in Mirtul of 1461 DR. It claims that a dying tiefling waytrader (independent peddler) told a rival about the cabal, describing them as "a handful of ruthless, calculating women—and some who are less than human, too—who are wise enough to avoid open battle and ambitious enough to end up ruling half the known Realms without reigning anywhere."

Later sources cited by Tathcaskur explained this claim as meaning that the Fael Threl work from afar, through enchanted items or manipulated, unwitting agents, to dominate rulers' decisions and ruthlessly eliminate others who influence rulers, unless the ends they seek are in accordance with the desires of the Fael Threl. Tathcaskur's notes also attest to at least six men being members of the Fael Threl. All of the evidence in the notebook points to the Fael Threl being magically powerful. Most sources speak of them as wizards, but two separate sources insist that they are sorcerers or even a hitherto unknown sort of spellcaster.

Tathcaskur believed that the Fael Threl are few in number but great in hidden influence, especially in Amn, Tethyr, and the Dragon Coast. He suspected that they are (or were at that time) expanding vigorously into Cormyr and Sembia. They actively worked to murder Cowled Wizards they could catch in isolated circumstances.

Interestingly, as the War Wizards have investigated this matter further, they looked into the death of courtesan Alorae Wanderwyrm, who died of poisoning by unknown hands in Suzail in 1472 DR. At the time, her final, gasped words were understood as, "I die, but fail forever!" Witnesses and those who knew her assumed them to be no more than fevered raving, but several War Wizards now wonder whether she was in fact whispering, "I die, but Fael forever!" If so, her words could mean that she was a member or loyal agent of the mysterious cabal. Her grave was exhumed a tenday ago—but her stone coffin was empty.

More Circling Fangs

Much of Tathcaskur's findings about the rings of circling fangs have been corroborated. One such "attested" power (proven at the recent cost of at least three Cormyrean lives) is the ability of the ring-wearer to conceal his or her true features by causing his or her head to resemble a darkmantle (see *Monster Manual 2*, page 41) of smaller size than a real one—small enough for the edges of the creature's "mantle" body to cover a ring-wearer of average adult human size just to the shoulders. This guise is brought about in one round by a flowing of the skin so that it covers the ring-wearer's hair. The alteration lasts as long as desired. Speech takes on a high, hissing tone, but otherwise the change has no effect on breathing, vision, or other abilities (oddly, the the ring-wearer retains his or her normal hue and number of eyes). When the ring-wearer wants to return to normal, he or she must will this to happen while wearing the ring. If the ring has been removed,

magical aid is needed, such as a Remove Affliction ritual, to reverse the condition. The return to normalcy is slower, typically taking three minutes.

The Fael Threl can use from afar a similar but far more sinister ring power: Once every 18 hours, they can cause a real, full-sized darkmantle enveloper to teleport (from unknown "otherwheres," as Tathcaskur put it) and appear silently just above a ring-wearer's head. Though these darkmantles don't arrive under anyone's control, they regard the ring-wearer as handy prey and attack in their usual manner.

According to Tathcaskur's notes, certain abuses of a fang-ring's powers, and its contact with particular hostile spells (several summonings, though for obvious reasons he could not experiment enough to assemble more than the bare beginnings of a list), will foil the hostile magic or intended ring activations and cause the ring to instantly vanish. His opinion was that the ring was not destroyed but teleported to another location. In at least one instance, the wearer's ring-finger went with it, being severed neatly at its base. At least two mages who intentionally provoked such disappearances while attempting by magical means to go along on the ring's translocation failed to do so. Thus far, no Cormyrean experimentation regarding these purported "vanishing" powers has been attempted, so this property remains unproven.

Trials of another ring property noted by Tathcaskur are, however, underway. Certain *rings of circling fangs* are special, being linked to eight or more other such rings. While their special power is used, wearers of the linked rings are mentally aware of the approximate distance and direction to the wearer of the special ring and can hear messages spoken or whispered by that ring's wearer. They cannot speak to the wearer of the special ring or hear or detect the distance and direction of each other. Tathcaskur wrote of these as "command" rings, but he made it clear in his notes that on at least two occasions, the wearers of such rings were unaware that other ring-wearers could see and "home in on" them. Cormyreans now examining the rings believe the Fael Threl can use (from afar, and without "command" ring-wearers knowing) the special rings to enable their wearers to be traced and overheard.

Tathcaskur stressed in his notes that he assembled only hints of dozens of other powers or properties associated with these rings, but he was led to the opinion that all were crafted to control distant individuals as unwitting agents of the ring-controller for some future purpose that is both large in scope and sinister in nature. He declined to speculate on what this aim might be but wrote the following:

> All indications point to a patient pursual of something deadly. It seems to me that such magical linkages assist teams of assassins, with the leader wearing the command ring, and the following of intended targets, with the target unwittingly wearing such a ring. In time of thronestrife, when a royal family or heirs are hidden away, one member could be followed to the others. In a bustling, crowded city, a team of spies or slayers could unerringly follow or converge upon one person. To me, these rings seem meant to topple thrones. Could those behind them be bent on covert empire?

Rings of Circling Fangs in Your Game

Because so much remains unknown about the *rings of circling fangs*, it may be wisest to keep them off the fingers of player characters. If a character does acquire such a ring, the description below indicates the properties and power which can be understood and controlled. Because these rings are so unusual, their uses can't be instantly understood. A character who studies the ring can make one Arcana skill check after each extended rest. To discover the ring's first property is a DC 18 check; to discover the ring's second property is a DC 25 check; and to discover its power is a DC 34 check. On a failed Arcana check, the character loses one healing surge in a mishap.

Ring of Circling Fangs **Level 20 Rare**

This slim, silver ring is engraved with a simple circle.

Item Slot: Ring 125,000 gp

Property: While you are bloodied, you gain an aura of force daggers. Any adjacent creature that attacks you takes 10 force damage.

Property: As a minor action, you can cause the daggers to shed dim light to a radius of 5 squares. The light can be extinguished with a free action.

Power (Encounter ✦ Force): Standard Action. *Effect:* One creature within 3 squares of you takes 20 force damage.

Optionally, the DM may add the following, additional power after further study.

Power (At-Will ✦ Polymorph): Standard Action. *Effect:* Your head assumes the form of a darkmantle's head, though smaller. You also gain a hissing, high-pitched voice. This effect lasts until you dismiss it (which takes 3 minutes). If you aren't wearing the ring when you wish to dismiss the effect, you must use the Remove Affliction ritual to end the effect.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Lie, Cheat, and Steal

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
illustration by Rob Alexander

A Dungeon Master is a downright despicable creature, possessing a cruel mind capable of describing and carrying out terrible, wicked depravity. And that's the way it should be.

Even if you are running the most granola-loving example of collaborative roleplaying, it's really your job to put the characters through the wringer. You may do that with crafty decision points that make the ones provided in *Dragon Age: Origins* seem quaint, but you still do it. This month I'm going to treat you to some of my favorite little dirty DM tricks. Keep in mind these tricks aren't meant to take advantage of your players. They're best used to ensure a fun and challenging game experience, not to show your dominance over others. Use them fairly and wisely, because while it is good to be cruel and devious, the best DMs are seemingly unaligned. One might say neutral.

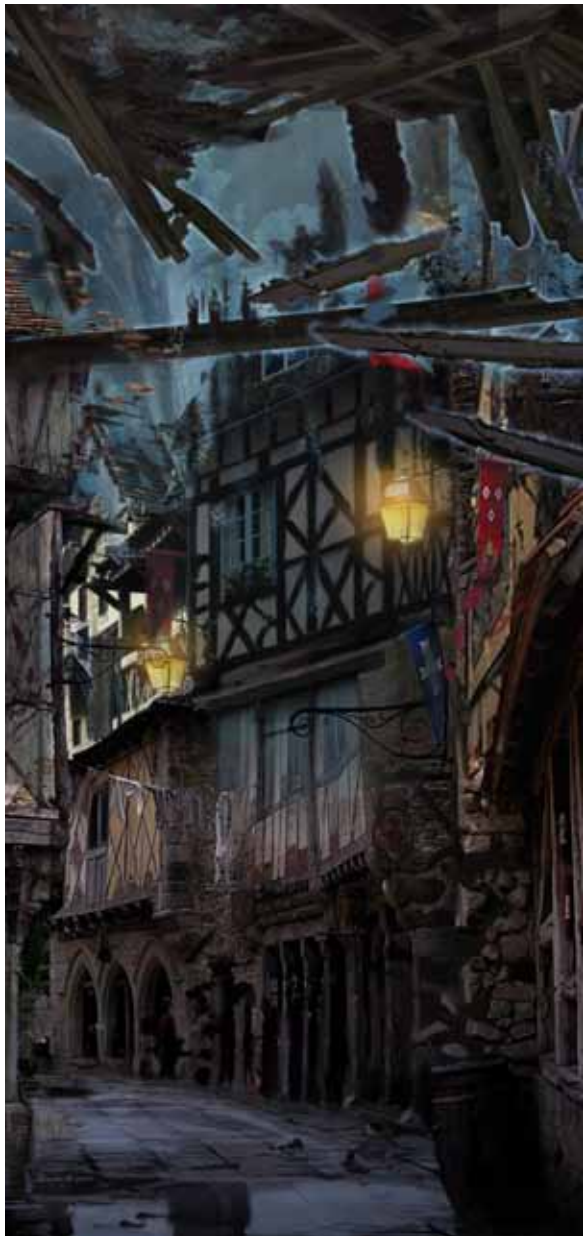
Lie

One of the best tricks that a DM can learn is that the truth is fluid in D&D. I'm not just talking about NPC motives, the duplicity of so-called allies in the story, and the inaccuracy of ancient reports of a treasure's location (although all are fun); I mean the so-called truths of the world are fluid.

The world of D&D is a lot like the dream world in the movie *Inception*. If we gave it an ounce of real scrutiny, our BS alarms would be a-ringin'. It is a world of fantasy, after all. It is also a game, so every so often we find awkward borders and strange constraints. But it is so much fun that we are engaged by it, and we suspend our disbelief.

At the same time, many DMs treat their game notes or the text in this adventure or that supplement as things carved in stone. So it is written, so it is done! Throw that out the window. Don't be afraid to change things on the fly in the midst of play. Riff off your players. Let their good ideas become your own.

For instance, let's say you had an ordinary boring human serve as the magister of a small town with a predominantly human population. He was supposed to give the characters a hard time for a bar brawl, but his main purpose was to introduce them to a possible employer and to showcase a bit of local color. But just before this encounter occurred, the characters were discussing how they don't trust tieflings in this town,



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because they seem to be running the local crime and gangs. One player may even (jokingly) say he is thinking of attacking every tiefling in sight, because they've been such a pain in the butt. It's time to kick that human out of there, and make the magister a tiefling. There is more story in it that way, and making that story talk directly to the characters' observations creates engagement. It will build more tension as the characters are forced to decide whether they can trust this guy. This small change makes a good encounter better.

Like anything, you can overdo this. I have in the past. I've changed names of NPCs I thought I hadn't used yet. I've gotten caught in seeming contradictions only to have to reason myself a way out (which can be done). If you are fast on your feet, you can turn screw-ups into opportunities. This is a feature, not a glitch of unscripted storytelling.

Take the swap to tiefling example above. Let's say I had already stated earlier that the magister was human. When a player questions this, have the tiefling respond: "Because I don't share the vices of my kin, many in town see me as human." Such a response makes the magister more ambiguous. Is he telling the truth, or is this just more evidence that he is a slick imposter in cahoots with the town's underground? The plot thickens.

Cheat

Proper lying takes finesse. Cheating tends to be easier, at least for us DMs. The strength of a DM's authority comes in the form of ultimate arbitration. We are DMs, we do what we want! But it's never good to be as blatant as the coppers in a David Peace novel. The trick is to subtly manipulate the game toward your direction, and that direction should be toward increased fun, challenge, immersion, and excitement.

With the changes of monster damage numbers and skill DCs, the reasons to cheat become fewer and fewer, but a few will always be there, because it depends on the situation. Here are some extreme examples:

- When a roadblock encounter becomes a bog of bad dice rolls, it's time to cheat a little.
- When everyone is rolling under 5 for their skill challenges, it's time to cheat a little.
- When your wizards just inexplicably killed all 15 minions, it's time to cheat a little.

This type of cheating is easy. Often it can be as blatant as a wave of the hand and on to the next encounter. Usually you can do this when you are cheating in the player's favor. If it speeds up the action and they benefit from it, they'll take the pass. When it's not in their favor, you need to be a little more tricksy.

I'll often change creature levels on the fly. For each level tacked on, boost hit points by 10 and attacks, defenses, and skill bonuses by one. Down is the opposite. It's not precise, but it's close enough when you're working fast. As a rule of thumb, I never downshift or upshift a monster more than two levels.

Even with the fantastic changes to the skill DC chart, from time to time I'll still upshift or downshift DCs on the fly. Typically that's either to add information or add tension. For instance, consider an optimized rogue who tries to pick a lock in a deity's dominion. He rolls a 13 and with his maxed-out bonus, that's high enough to succeed. But this is a deity's lock! It ought to be tougher to spring open than that even for a top-notch thief. I may up the DC then and there so that a roll of 14 or 15 is needed. Eventually the player will get the roll that he needs, and the delay gets across how nearly perfect things are within the realms of the gods.

The trick of this monster change is to do it before the players gain true intelligence of the actual numbers, and to notate it on your monster or DC notes. That way you can avoid WTF moments a month down the road.

What's the art of keeping monsters alive? That's a whole column. I've often experimented with or changed the rules for minions. Living Forgotten Realms adventures feature some interesting variations on the minion rules to fit climactic encounters. I've found inspiration from many of them. I'm sure a lot of you reading this have, too.

See, you're already a cheater. Certainly, cheater is too harsh a description.

Steal

James Wyatt mentioned this in his last Dungeoncraft column, but it's worth restating: plagiarize, plagiarize, and plagiarize. This is sometimes hard for a DM to do, because many of us harbor deep-seated desires to have our opus see published form one day. Go ahead; it's OK to admit it. But I'm going to tell you something. It's a hard truth; it's a real truth. That's not going to happen. Well, not anytime soon, and before then, you will have plenty of time to scrub out all the crap you stole.

I often steal strange little story hooks. Other times I steal characters. Many times I make those thefts rather blatant, so at least some of my players will get the joke; hokey, I know, but often effective. It's OK to be a little meta, because D&D is a game with a bunch of meta. Monsters are stolen or rehashed from every mythology on the planet and a host of preceeding fantasy fiction. As D&D talks to MMORPGs and vice versa, they swap a lot of spit. We aren't writing *A Game of Thrones* here, we are good old-fashioned Cops and Robbers. We are Vaudeville unplugged. And that's awesome!

If you aren't willing to seem even a little hokey, it can be hard to steal effectively. Among a group of friends, a shared canon of geek works arises. Comics and novels get swapped, you go to the same movies, and you watch the same TV shows. This is where it pays to be quirky. For me, that means old movies. I'm a sucker for any historical movie made before 1970. Many of them are bad, but I still find strange characters and story points in these films. I think every character from the old Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton flick Becket has appeared in my game at some point or another. King Henry is actually the model of an eladrin lord that comes in and out of the characters' lives from time to time. He is spoiled, duplicitous, capricious, and always fun.

I steal art for NPC illustrations. I steal encounter ideas from the pages of *Dungeon Magazine* all the time. Unless you are writing an article for *Dungeon* or you are earning money, professional recognition, or educational recognition for your ideas though from the work, stealing is just good clean fun between friends around a table. It's like a cowboy camp or the courts of 12th century France. Let the tall tales and the half-truths fly.

The Mailbag

It's that time in the column—let's look in the mailbag. If you have one of those hard questions about being a DM, post on the Save My Game group in the Wizards Community. It features a community of helpful DMs that will give you their own sound advice. Every month, I take a few of these questions and give you my take here. This month, I'm tackling one, big question asked by a player. It's a dozy.

The Big Question

Don't get me wrong, my DM is a good one, who seems to follow all the expert advice from all of the 4e communities, and really does put the effort in.

However, maybe it's because I can see too far through the curtain, or maybe I'm not the sort of person 4th edition was designed for, but leveling up and getting magic items aren't fun anymore.

I can really feel the entire world leveling up with us, but only numerically. As much as I'd love to confront the DM about this, I don't know what to say. How can I suggest he make a level 15 encounter FEEL like it isn't a level 14 encounter? How can I get "DC 20 insight check" to feel different from an insight check of any other level? How can I get the normal and limited damage expressions of improvised ideas, to feel appropriate to how much damage they actually do, instead of the level of the encounter?

—Jonydude from the Save My Game group

It may seem strange that I'm answering a player's question in SMG, but this is one I get over and over. And not always from players—often it comes from DMs. There is no magic answer for this one. The game itself only gives you brief and sometimes scattered advice on this subject.

I think that most people think the game, as written, is thematically fine in the Heroic Tier. You find out where bad guys are and you stomp them in the place where they live. But by paragon tier, players start to expect more. They're paragons, damn it. The stories should be bigger. More often than not, paragon characters are humping it in the dungeons of the bad dude the same way they were doing when they were 1st level.

The first thing the DM should do is find a way to make his stories seem more paragon. What's the difference between heroic and paragon? Here is my theory. In heroic tier, the characters are nobodies—the thorn in the side of the local Federation of D&D Villains. In paragon tier, they are somebodies. Kings vie for their favor, local tyrants fear them, and orc bands run from them. Because of this, characters will need to make hard choices of a political nature, or at least on issues that reach beyond their own small concerns. Their decision points aren't limited to, should I take the left corridor or the right. Instead they should be, do I help Duke Vendros hold off the monstrosities surging from the demon gate, or should I heed the call of the treacherous Baron Trask because he raised the entire party when they fell in the Caverns of Tanga-Na.

Making this switch can be rough, especially for new DMs. There's the comfortable momentum of continuing to do what's worked so far. Beyond that, you might feel that you've finally mastered the skill of building good heroic-tier encounters right about the time that characters reach paragon tier. You have to shake out of it. There are new challenges to be had.

The second thing the DM should do is look at each character's paragon path and create adventures and challenges that talk directly to those paragon paths. If a player wants their wizard to be a blood mage, start asking how people feel about blood magic. While you can riff on (maybe even steal) the ideas in *Dragon Age: Origins*, you don't need to. Blood Mages may be overseen by the church of Pelor, as blood mages are often in danger of the sin of lichdom. Most paragon paths don't have loads of story in them, but don't let that limit you. Being a paragon is a lot like being a teenager—everything is about the characters. Their choices should create their struggles.

So what about epic play? I like to think of epic play as the place where characters find out they are not nearly as powerful as they once thought. They find that their concerns before were petty and small compared to the concerns that they discover. At that point, epic almost becomes a superhero campaign. I equate epic play to the Justice League.

But I'll be honest with you—my current campaigns aren't there yet. Give me a few more months to see whether I change my mind.

About the Author

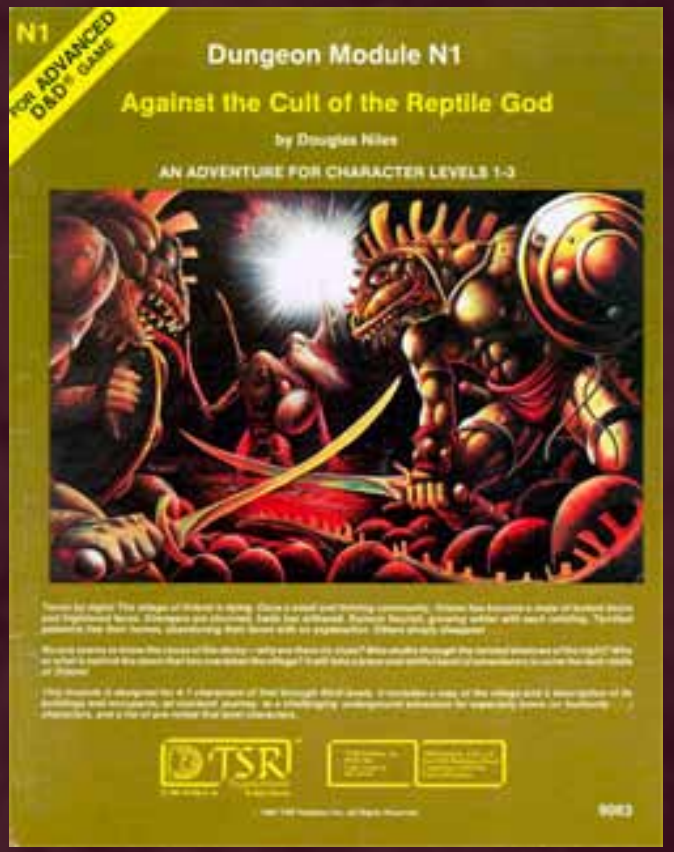
Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA, and a developer for the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons® rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast and Paizo Publishing, and he is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. During the daylight hours, he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

PARAGON 11-20

Revisiting the Naga's Throne Room

A classic Dungeons & Dragons® module encounter for characters of 10th-12th level

By Craig A. Campbell



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In 1982, author Douglas Niles introduced Dungeons & Dragons® players to a nefarious cult in *Dungeon Module N1: Against the Cult of the Reptile God*. At the end of this classic adventure, the heroes faced Explictica Defilus, the spirit naga, in her subterranean throne room. This vile creature has lain dormant for almost three decades, plotting and scheming, awaiting the day when she might again plague stalwart adventurers. Finally, her day is at hand. Are your players ready to revisit the Throne Room of Explictica Defilus?

A Note on Spoilers

This Dungeons & Dragons encounter recreates the battle with the spirit naga named Explictica Defilus at the end of *Against the Cult of the Reptile God*. To that end, it references several aspects of the original AD&D® module, including the spirit naga, her lair, and sundry other bits and pieces described in the original module.

Translating the Classic

This article seeks to recreate the final encounter of *Against the Cult of the Reptile God* for the current game audience. In the original module, the heroes come upon the once thriving community of Orlane, which has fallen on hard times. Although the small village once served as a bastion of peace and happiness, recently a dark force visited it and terrified the populace. Trade withered away and several inhabitants of

the village have gone missing. This leads the heroes to delve into the village's problem, and it can ultimately cause them to confront a dastardly cult and its reptilian matron.

DMs are encouraged to use this encounter independently as a side trek in their current campaign; or, if they are familiar with the original module, allow it to serve as a basis for recreating the spirit and flavor of the original adventure.

Encounter Setup

The heroes come upon Orlane, a village beset by a nefarious cult. The village's population is decreasing due to the cult's machinations. The citizens of the village are in dire need of heroes to save them. This leads the heroes to determine the cult's plans and rescue those who have been abducted.

Alternatively, you could choose to set the encounter near a village with which the heroes are already familiar, so that when key villagers (for example, their favorite barkeep, shop owner, or contact) start disappearing or acting strangely, the heroes take immediate notice.

DMs can build up to the fight with Explictica Defilus in any way they wish. However, to best engender the spirit of the original module, DMs are encouraged to lay out a series of encounters that mimic portions of the original module.

Encounter Synopsis

The encounter centers on Explictica Defilus, the spirit naga. In the original module, the heroes encountered her in her subterranean throne room and she was a significant threat in her own right.

Nagas are typically elite creatures, rather than solo adversaries. This encounter keeps the naga as an elite foe, but also adds some servants and slaves to the mix, creating a more dynamic encounter with the heroes fighting multiple monsters.

This encounter is designed for characters of 10th–12th level. As a result, the encounter provides three different sets of monsters that a DM can use in the encounter to provide a combat challenge of levels 12–14. The variation in monsters for each encounter level is slight, but significant. Assume that the appropriate challenge for a party is two levels higher than the party members' level, since the encounter is intended to be the one with the "big bad" at the end of an adventure.

Additionally, several encounter variations allow the DM to customize the encounter to his or her liking. These variations are based on specific information presented in the original module. Below is a brief synopsis of these variations. More specific information appears later in this article.

- **Spirit Monster Theme:** Originally, Explictica Defilus was a spirit naga. This encounter defines her as a guardian naga. However, several monster theme powers are provided below for DMs who wish to augment the guardian naga in such a way as to more closely mimic the capabilities of the spirit naga in the original adventure.
- **Ramne the Hermit:** In the original module, the heroes encountered a local hermit named Ramne. He was a wizard who accompanied the heroes during the latter part of the adventure. Ramne is described below as a companion character, with complete statistics per the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* guidelines for such. Keep in mind that the encounter is designed for five characters. If your party is already five characters strong and you choose to incorporate Ramne, adjust things accordingly.
- **Special Player Character Powers:** The original module described some methods by which the heroes might hinder the spirit naga's attacks. This article describes what actions your heroes might take to confound Explictica Defilus.

Encounter: The Throne Room of Explictica Defilus

Encounter Level 12 (3,675 XP)

Setup

Explictica Defilus, naga (N)
2 kuo-toa marauders (K)
5 troglodyte warriors (T)

Encounter Level 13 (4,475 XP)

Setup

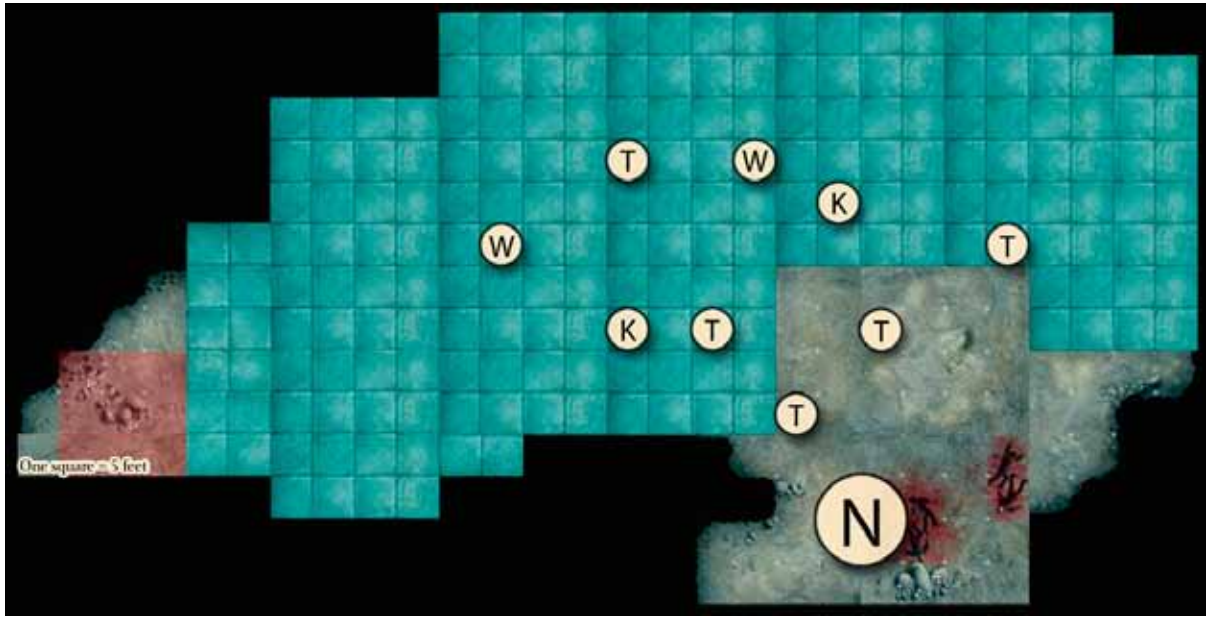
Explictica Defilus, naga (N)
2 kuo-toa marauders (K)
5 troglodyte warriors (T)
1 water archon shoal reaver (W)

Encounter Level 14 (5,875 XP)

Setup

Explictica Defilus, naga (N)
2 kuo-toa harpooners (K)
5 troglodyte warriors (T)
2 water archon shoal reavers (W)

This encounter takes place in the subterranean lair of Explictica Defilus. When the heroes arrive at her lair (the shaded red area on the map), the naga is resting among the bodies of several dead villagers, admiring her accumulated treasure. Her servants and guardians are scattered about her lair, as shown on the encounter map.



When the characters first arrive in the naga's lair, read:

You peer into the darkness of a large, subterranean chamber. Just in front of you, a large pool of stagnant water awaits you. In the distance, you hear the sloshing of one or more creatures moving restlessly in the water.

The throne room is completely dark. All the monsters, except for the shoal reavers, have darkvision. This being the case, the heroes likely need to bring light sources into the cavern. If they do so, they have no chance of surprising the monsters.

The kuo-toa and water archon shoal reavers are aquatic creatures and can breathe underwater. When the encounter begins, they are crouched beneath the surface of the water and invisible to the heroes. They can stand up as a free action.

If the heroes sneak quietly into the chamber without light sources, have them make appropriate Stealth checks against the monsters' passive Perception scores to determine if they gain the advantage of a surprise round.

The encounter map provides starting locations for two water archon shoal reavers (for the level 14 encounter). If you're using the level 13 version of this encounter, place one shoal reaver at either of these starting locations.

The encounter map can be assembled using tiles from *DU3: Caves of Carnage* along with any set that includes several generic dungeon floor tiles. The generic dungeon floor tiles on the map are covered in water that is 3 feet deep.

Tactics

Explictica Defilus avoids the party unless forced into melee combat, favoring *word of pain* to deal with her enemies at range. She uses *thunderstrike* whenever she can catch two or more foes in the effect. If approached by multiple foes in melee, she uses *spit poison* and removes herself from melee as soon as possible. She values her servants and slaves and uses them to best possible effect at all times, issuing commands to coordinate their efforts.

The troglodytes are slaves of the naga and fight obediently. When combat begins, they interpose themselves between the heroes and their master, seeking to protect her at the cost of their lives. They stay close to their enemies at all times so as to take advantage of their aura power.

The kuo-toa gang up on the strongest seeming hero, seeking to flank with each other or with the troglodytes. They use *sticky shield* to deny their foes their weapons and *slick maneuver* to stay in flank with their allies. Harpooners use *reeling harpoon* to force their enemies into combat with them, following up with *harpoon* to lock their foes down.

The water archon shoal reavers use *water harpoon* to force their foes into combat with them and then lay into them with *trident*. They use *whirlpool of tines* to deal with multiple foes in close combat.

The kuo-toa and shoal reavers have swim speeds, so they move normally in the pool in the naga's lair.

5 Troglodyte Warriors (T) **Level 12 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP 175 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +6
AC 25, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +6
Speed 5 Darkvision

Traits

Troglodyte Stench ✦ Aura 1
Living enemies within the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 7 damage.

Skills Athletics +15, Endurance +14

Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 12 (+7)	**Wis** 11 (+6)
Con 16 (+9)	**Int** 6 (+4)	**Cha** 8 (+5)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Draconic
Equipment club, light shield

Features of the Area

Illumination: The chamber is completely dark.

Cavern Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 4 squares above the cavern floor.

Cavern Walls: The walls of the cavern are uneven stone and are slimy in places. Climbing the cavern walls requires a DC 17 Athletics check.

Cavern Floor: Areas denoted by cavern floor tiles on the map are dry. The rest of the chamber is filled with water.

Pool: Most of the cavern (all squares shown as standard dungeon floor tiles on the map) is filled with 3 feet of murky water. Heroes that drop a weapon must use a move action to retrieve their weapon, rather than a minor action, unless they have darkvision. The entire pool is treated as difficult terrain for creatures that don't have a swim speed. Creatures with a swim speed can move normally in the pool.

Explictica Defilus (N) **Level 12 Elite Artillery**
Large immortal magical beast (reptile) XP 1,400

HP 186; **Bloodied** 93 **Initiative** +10
AC 25, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 22 **Perception** +13
Speed 6 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Tail Slap ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Word of Pain ✦ At-Will
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +15 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 10 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Effect: Explictica Defilus uses word of pain twice, making each attack against a different target.

Spit Poison (poison) **✦ At-Will, Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 8 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage, and a -2 penalty to saving throws (save ends all).

Thunderstrike (thunder) **✦ At-Will, Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (creatures in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Skills Arcana +15, History +15, Insight +13

Str 16 (+9)	**Dex** 18 (+10)	**Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 15 (+8)	**Int** 18 (+8)	**Cha** 12 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Supernal

2 Kuo-toa Marauders (K) **Level 12 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 700

HP 119; **Bloodied** 59 **Initiative** +11
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +11
Speed 6, swim 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

Slavering Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Move Actions

Slick Manuever ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.

Minor Actions

Quick Step ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The kuo-toa must be bloodied.
Effect: The kuo-toa shifts 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Sticky Shield ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The kuo-toa is missed by a melee attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Effect (Immediate Reaction): A weapon wielded by the target drops in the target's space.

Str 15 (+8)	**Dex** 16 (+9)	**Wis** 11 (+6)
Con 15 (+8)	**Int** 11 (+6)	**Cha** 13 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Equipment leather armor, slimy light shield, spear

2 Kuo-toa Harpooners (K) **Level 14 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 1,000

HP 137; **Bloodied** 68 **Initiative** +12
AC 28, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 24 **Perception** +13
Speed 6, swim 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

Harpoon (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 5 damage (escape DC 21). While the target is grabbed, the kuo-toa harpooner cannot use the harpoon to make attacks.

Reeling Harpoon (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage, and the kuo-toa makes a secondary attack against the same target.
Secondary Attack: +18 vs. Fortitude.
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is pulled 3 squares.

Move Actions

Slick Manuever ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.

Triggered Actions

Sticky Shield ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The kuo-toa is missed by a melee attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. Reflex
Effect (Immediate Reaction): A weapon wielded by the target drops in the target's space.

Str 17 (+10)	**Dex** 17 (+10)	**Wis** 13 (+8)
Con 17 (+10)	**Int** 13 (+8)	**Cha** 15 (+9)

Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Equipment leather armor, slimy light shield, 4 harpoons

2 Water Archon Shoal Reavers (K) **Level 13 Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid (aquatic, water) XP 800

HP 159; **Bloodied** 79 **Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24 **Perception** +7
Speed 6, swim 7
Immune disease, forced movement, poison; **Resist** 10 acid; **Vulnerable** cold (an archon that takes cold damage is slowed until the end of its next turn)
Saving Throws +2 against immobilized, restrained, slowed

Standard Actions

Trident (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC until the end of its next turn.

Water Harpoon (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 5 damage, and the archon pulls the target adjacent to it.

Whirlpool of Tines ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes 2 damage for each square it moves on its turn (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target takes 1 damage for each square it moves on its turn (save ends).

Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 15 (+8)	**Wis** 13 (+7)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 12 (+7)	**Cha** 10 (+6)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Equipment scale armor, trident

Encounter Variations

DMs can use the following variations and additional rules to customize this encounter.

Spirit Monster Theme In the original module, Explictica Defilus is a spirit naga. The stat block provided above is for a guardian naga. DMs can use the following array of spirit theme powers to augment their personal versions of Explictica Defilus to bring her in line with the monster presented in the original adventure. Feel free to give Explictica Defilus one or more of these powers. The *enthralling gaze* attack power is particularly important for recreating the feel of the original monster. However, if your heroes are particularly powerful, feel free to give her three or even all four of the powers.

You might also choose to have some of the naga's allies be spirit-themed creatures. The best choice here is the naga's kuo-toa allies. The *prescient jump* utility power is the ideal option for them, since it helps them reposition and better protect their spirit naga matron.

Attack Powers The souls of spirit-themed monsters are filled with a fiery spark that influences their every action. They seek to spread pain and misery in myriad ways. This spark might manifest as an *enthralling gaze* or a *wrath of the inner spark*. The following attack powers are available to spirit-themed monsters.

Minor Actions

Enthralling Gaze (charm, gaze) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); level +3 vs. Will

Hit: The target is dominated until the end of the creature's next turn.

Traits

☼ **Wreath of the Inner Spark** (fire) ✦ **Aura** 2

Any enemy that enters the aura or starts its turn there takes 3 fire damage.

Level 11: 6 fire damage.

Level 21: 9 fire damage.

Utility Powers Spirit monsters often have means of avoiding direct confrontation, relying on these powers to get out of trouble or otherwise defend themselves. In essence, their spirit selves seek to save their physical selves from harm.

Move Actions

Spirit Shield ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: The creature shifts 2 squares and gains a +4 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Prescient Jump ✦ **Encounter**

Trigger: An enemy attacks the creature.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The creature teleports its speed.

New Cultists of the Reptile God

This original adventure involved villagers being kidnapped and charmed by the naga to join her cult. Those who resisted were killed to feed her guardians, or transformed into mindless zombie slaves.

As an added element of peril (and to add a creepy sense of cultish workings), you might replace the naga's monstrous guardians with charmed villagers, especially if you are basing the encounter near a village with which the heroes are already familiar. This can serve to create a richer connection with the heroes' base of operations (assuming it's the village they're saving) instead of otherwise less memorable inhabitants.

Treat the villagers the same as the listed monsters (assuming their new strength and powers somehow derive from the naga's possession over them), but if they are rendered unconscious instead of killed, the heroes can negate the naga's charm after she is defeated.

The Flooded Throne Pool This encounter has set the water level at 3 feet deep, so the heroes can cross on their own (albeit with no small difficulty). In the original, the pool was significantly deeper and required the heroes to ferry themselves across to the naga's alcove.

To add greater danger to the encounter, you can similarly deepen the pool. The heroes will need to find a suitable boat along the way, or else place one at the pool's edge. During combat, the guardians try to tip the boat or pull heroes out with *reeling harpoon*, attempting to drown them.

Ramne If you wish to use Ramne in your encounter, make sure to introduce him a few encounters before the fight with the spirit naga so that the players can familiarize themselves with his capabilities. Ramne can also warn the heroes about the naga's powers and mentions his own *freeing word*, asking the heroes to help dictate when he should use it.

The following stat block seeks to recreate Ramne by translating his best spells from the original module.

Ramne	**Level 10 Leader (variant)**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP –
HP 71; **Bloodied** 35; **Healing Surges** 9	**Initiative** +5
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 25	**Perception** +7
Speed 6	

Standard Actions

Staff ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC

Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

Magic Missile (force, implement) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature)

Hit: 10 damage.

Lightning Bolt (implement, lightning) **✦ Encounter**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 8 lightning damage, and Ramne makes a secondary attack against two creatures within 10 squares of the target.

Secondary Attack: +16 vs. Reflex.

Hit: 1d6 + 8 lightning damage.

Protective Globe (zone) **✦ Daily**

Effect: Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst). The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Ramne's next turn. Allies gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against attacks that originate outside the zone while they are within the zone. The zone moves with Ramne.

Sustain Minor: The zone persists.

Minor Actions

Freeing Word ✦ Encounter

Effect: Choose one ally within 5 squares of Ramne that is dazed, dominated, immobilized, slowed, or stunned. That ally immediately makes a saving throw against one of these conditions. Ramne can use this power twice per encounter, but only once per turn.

Triggered Actions

Shroud of Invisibility ✦ Encounter

Trigger: Ramne is hit by an attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): Ramne becomes invisible until the end of his next turn. In addition, he shifts up to 3 squares.

Skills Arcana +16, History +16, Nature +15

Str 8 (+4)	**Dex** 11 (+5)	**Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 14 (+7)	**Int** 16 (+8)	**Cha** 12 (+6)

Alignment good **Languages** Common

Equipment robes, staff

Special Hero Powers

In the original module, the heroes could use *light* spells to subvert the naga's gaze attack. In the spirit of such resourceful tactics, the heroes can use special powers to protect themselves during this encounter.

Incorporate these special powers only if the players are inventive enough to come up with the idea on their own. These should not be freebies that you hand out to the players, since they can potentially negate the spirit naga's *enthralling gaze* power. Make the players work for them; that said, you might wish to plant the seed for these ideas with rumors (or Ramne's warnings) about the naga's gaze.

Standard Actions

Throw Light Source ✦ At-Will

Requirement: You must be wielding a hand-held light source (such as a torch or sunrod) to use this power.

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); ranged basic attack vs. Reflex

Hit: The target cannot use attacks with the gaze keyword until the start of your next turn.

Minor Actions

Avert Eyes ✦ At-Will

Effect: You choose to avert your eyes from one creature to protect yourself from gaze attacks, but this comes at a cost. You gain immunity to all attacks with the gaze keyword coming from that creature. However, you are treated as if under the blinded condition.

Conclusion

If the heroes defeat Explictica Defilus, reward them with treasure appropriate to a major villain. If the heroes flee after encountering the spirit naga, they earn the enmity of a very powerful foe. Explictica Defilus redoubles her efforts in the village and forges alliances with other fell creatures in the area. If the heroes attempt to confront her again, she is surrounded by more powerful allies and servants. If the heroes abandon the village, Explictica Defilus leaves a trusted ally in charge of her dealings in the village and pursues the heroes personally, intent upon wreaking her own personal vengeance against those who so brazenly assaulted her in her throne room. If this happens, she plagues the heroes throughout their future endeavors until she finally confronts them on her own terms.

About the Author

Craig Campbell was suckered into playing D&D in 1990 when some of his college friends told him he needed to get out less. In the time since, he's devoured many sourcebooks, transforming himself into a zombie-like creature that constantly seeks to tell amazing stories and eat the brains of his players. Hailing from northeastern Wisconsin (go Packers!), he currently lives in Marietta, Georgia with his all-consuming love of bad movies.